

# Signaling Extended Deterrent Threats: Beijing as a Signaler During the Cold War

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**Boston College**

**The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences**

**Department of Political Science**

**SIGNALING EXTENDED DETERRENT THREATS:  
BEIJING AS A SIGNALER DURING THE COLD WAR**

**Thesis**

**by**

**YUXING HUANG**

**submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements**

**for the degree of**

**Master of Arts**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the credibility issue in China's extended deterrent attempts during the Cold War. In its efforts to protect North Korea, North Vietnam and Kampuchea, how did China convey its threats, and why did these initiatives have differing results? First, I argue that signaling is the key explaining credibility of China's extended deterrent threats across space and time. While ambiguous signals ruined China's credibility in deterring challenges on North Korea and Kampuchea, clear-cut signals backed threats in China's attempts to save North Vietnam. Consequently, China's signals in the first two cases were disregarded or misunderstood but were perceived as expected in the last case. Secondly, the paper seeks to appraise the explanatory power of current theoretical approaches with regard to the effectiveness of extended deterrent threats. Balance of interests (BOI) and Balance of Capabilities (BOC) shed lights on sources of deterrence outcomes, but neither of them is sufficient to explain the cases. The paper concludes that China's peaceful rising is more likely if Beijing signals its interests and capabilities more clearly.

## INTRODUCTION

“Deterrence, in its broadest sense, means persuading an opponent not to initiate a specific action because the perceived benefits do not justify the estimated costs and risks.”<sup>1</sup> If potential attacks target on a state’s protégés, “basic” deterrence develops into extended deterrence. Once armed forces and sustained combat are involved, deterrent attempts will fail.<sup>2</sup>

Straightforward as it seems, evaluation of deterrence is difficult for three reasons. First, according to deterrence theory, deterrence failure occurs only when the defender has “carefully defined the unacceptable behavior, threatened retaliation, had the capability to implement the threat, demonstrated resolve, but the challenger still proceeded to use force.”<sup>3</sup> Second, the challenger’s calculation in the first place is decisive. “The potential attacker would have attacked in the absence of a deterrent threat.”<sup>4</sup> But evidence of the challenger’s intention is always limited. Third, two core concepts, credibility of the defender and deterrability of the challenger cannot be measured directly.<sup>5</sup>

This paper examines the credibility of China’s extended deterrent threats during the Cold War by asking two questions. First, how did China tailor its words and/or actions as signals to protect its protégés? Second, how did China manipulate the

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<sup>1</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Paul K. Huth, *Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 26; Paul K. Huth, “Deterrence and International Conflict: Empirical Findings and Theoretical Debates,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 2. (1999), p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, “Rational Deterrence Theory: I Think, Therefore I Deter,” *World Politics*, Vol. 41, No. 2, (January 1989), p. 220.

<sup>4</sup> Jack S. Levy, “When Do Deterrent Threats Work?” *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 18, No. 4. (October 1988), p. 507.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p. 83; Daryl G. Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 11.

credibility of its threats? I will begin with an outline of theoretical framework on signaling extended deterrent threats, and then proceed with the detailed discussion of three case studies through an examination of newly available primary sources—published archival sources, documentary collections, memoirs, and newspapers—as well as making inferences from secondary works and propaganda.<sup>6</sup> This study seeks to contribute to theoretical debates on sources of extended deterrence outcomes and China's Cold War coercive diplomacy.

## CREDIBILITY OF EXTENDED DETERRENT THREATS

### SOURCES OF EXTENDED DETERRENCE OUTCOMES

Although factors contributing to deterrence outcomes are always interconnected, extended deterrence outcomes can be explained by balance of interests (BOI), balance of capabilities (BOC), and communication.

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<sup>6</sup> Major sources cited in this paper include: (1) Shen Zhihua, ed., *Chaoxian Zhanzheng: E'guo dang'an guan de jiemi wenjian* [The Korean War: Declassified Documents from Archives in Russia] (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 2003), cited as **CXZZ**; (2) *Department of State Bulletin* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, various volumes), cited as **DSB**; (3) *Foreign Relations of the United States*, (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, various volumes), cited as **FRUS**; (4) *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* [Manuscripts of Mao Zedong Since the Founding of the Nation] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, various volumes), cited as **JGYLMZDWG**; (5) *Jianguo yilai Zhou Enlai wengao* [Manuscripts of Zhou Enlai Since the Founding of the Nation] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, various volumes), cited as **JGYLZELWG**; (6) Pang Xianzhi and Jin Chongji, eds., *Mao Zedong zhuan (1949-1976)* [Biography of Mao Zedong (1949-1976)] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2003), cited as **MZDZ**; (7) Zhou Junlun, eds., *Nie Rongzhen nianpu* [A Chronicle of Nie Rongzhen's Life] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1999), cited as **NRZNP**; (8) *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decision-making on Vietnam*, The Senator Gravel Edition, (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1971), cited as **Pentagon Papers**; (9) *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiao dashiji* [Chronicle of Major Events in the History of Diplomacy in People's Republic of China] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2002), cited as **WJDJS**; (10) Liu Wusheng and Du Hongqi, eds., *Zhou Enlai junshi huodong jishi xiajuan* [Chronicle of Zhou Enlai's Military Activities] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2000), cited as **ZELJSHDJS**; (11) *Zhou Enlai junshi wenxuan* [Zhou Enlai's Selected Works on Military Affairs] (Beijing: Remin chubanshe, 1997), cited as **ZELJSWX**; (12) *Zhou Enlai nianpu, shangjuan* [A Chronicle of Zhou Enlai's Life] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1997), cited as **ZELNP**; (13) Chinese Foreign Ministry, ed., *Zhou Enlai waijiao huodong dashiji, 1949-1975* [Chronicle of Major Events of Zhou Enlai's Activities on Foreign Affairs, 1949-1975] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1993), cited as **ZELWJHDDSJ**; (14) Jin Chongji, ed., *Zhou Enlai zhuan* [Biography of Zhou Enlai] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1998), cited as **ZELZ**.



### *BOI and BOC*

Extended deterrence involves conflict between a defender and a challenger. The defender's risk acceptance can be determined by the relative importance of its protégé to its interests, and credibility of threats partly depends upon interests involved.<sup>7</sup> For example, as predicted by BOI, extended deterrent commitments are always suspect given the "selfish" nature of states.<sup>8</sup> The primary interest of a defender is to deter potential attacks upon his own assets, not its protégé's well-being. If the challenger has more interests at stake vis-à-vis its defender, "[extended deterrent] threats may well be communicated clearly and credibly but, at the same time, be insufficient to deter."<sup>9</sup>

BOI, nevertheless, is inadequate in two aspects. First, capabilities matter. A powerful defender may successfully deter a weak challenger, even though the defender has fewer interests involved. For instance, interests in West Berlin were favorable to the Soviets rather than the U.S. because of geopolitical considerations. However, Soviet challenges were always deterred by U.S. due to nuclear capabilities gap between them. Second, calculations of interests depend upon communication. As Richard Lebow and Janice Stein put it, "in crisis of misunderstanding, [t]he incompatibility of interests is more than real."<sup>10</sup> It is therefore insufficient to explain deterrence failure in which BOI is

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<sup>7</sup> Vesna Danilovic, *When the Stakes are High: Deterrence and Conflict among Major Powers* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002), pp. 4-5.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 36; Paul Gordon Lauren, "Theories of Bargaining with Threats of Force: Deterrence and Coercive Diplomacy," in Paul Gordon Lauren, ed., *Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory, and Policy* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1979), pp. 190-193; Huth, *Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War*, pp. 1-2; George, "Coercive Diplomacy: Definition and Characteristics," pp. 280-281; Robert J. Art, "Coercive Diplomacy: What do we Know?" in Robert J. Art and Patrick M. Cronin, eds., *The United States and Coercive Diplomacy* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2003), p. 373.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Gordon Lauren, Gordon A. Craig and Alexander L. George, *Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Challenges of Our Time* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 179.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, *We all Lost the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 322.

in the defender's favor. If a challenger underestimates a defender's interests involved due to the defender's signaling efforts, deterrence is also likely to fail.<sup>11</sup>

These two limits will be discussed in detail in case studies. First, both China and the U.S. acknowledged that interests in North Korea were favorable to China, but Beijing's extended deterrent efforts still failed in 1950. Additionally, interests in North Korea and North Vietnam were favorable to China in 1950 and 1965 respectively, but deterrence outcomes were different. Washington underestimated Beijing's interests in 1950 through ambiguous signals, while correctly perceived them in 1965 through clear-cut signals. In conclusion, BOI's explanatory power cannot be directly extended to the effects of extended deterrent threats, although it could sometimes predicts deterrence outcomes.

Credibility of threats also partially depends upon overall capabilities that a defender and a challenger can mobilize.<sup>12</sup> BOC argues effective deterrence generally requires a wide capability gap in the defender's favor.<sup>13</sup> Reasonable as it seems, BOC has some loopholes as well in explaining deterrence failure. It offers weak explanation why a challenger may still initiate attacks regardless of his disadvantageous position and thus makes the deterrence not work at all. U.S. deterrence against Saddam Hussein, for instance, was ineffective although U.S. was much more powerful than its adversary. Misinterpretation of a defender's signals, specifically, can make its challenger to be overconfident in its own capabilities, and deterrence is therefore likely to fail. As will be

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Jervis, "Deterrence and Perception," *International Security*, Vol. 7, No. 3. (Winter 1982/1983), p. 28.

<sup>12</sup> Huth, *Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War*, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Lawrence Freedman, "Strategic Coercion," in Lawrence Freedman, ed., *Strategic Coercion: Concepts and Cases* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 30.

shown in the paper, BOC were favorable to China in each case along its periphery, but deterrent attempts succeeded only in 1965, while failed in 1950 and 1978.

### *Communication*

The study of communication is the study of signaling, because signals are the principal source for interpreting adversaries' intentions. Specifically, signaling is important to the credibility because the defender's claim to protect another party is more questionable in extended deterrence compared with basic deterrence.<sup>14</sup>

Problem of communication reflect either subjective or objective biases when interpreting signals. Psychological and cognitive bias is prevalent in international politics.<sup>15</sup> With regard to effective deterrence, it requires "both understanding the other side's view of the state and predicting its view of the state's policy. Unfortunately, often each side will have a different view, with the result that the actual impact of the policy greatly differs from the expected one."<sup>16</sup> Doctrinal difference as an example of subjective bias may explain conflict escalation and deterrence failure. When two nations have different theories of victory, a mutual misunderstanding of relative capabilities would be highly likely to lead to underestimation of the adversary and the failure of deterrence.<sup>17</sup>

Communication could also be affected by the "objective nature" of signals. Maximum explicitness in threats can result in maximum credibility. Ambiguity, on the

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<sup>14</sup> Patrick M. Morgan, *Deterrence Now* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 19; Timothy W. Crawford, "The Endurance of Extended Deterrence: Continuity, Change, and Complexity in Theory and Policy," in T.V. Paul, Patrick M. Morgan, and James J. Wirtz, eds., *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009). pp. 282-283.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).

<sup>16</sup> Robert Jervis, "Perceiving and Coping with Threat," in Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow, and Janice Gross Stein, eds., *Psychology and Deterrence* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 30.

<sup>17</sup> Christopher P. Twomey, *The Military Lens: Doctrinal Difference and Deterrence Failure in Sino-American Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

other hand, means indeterminacy, and mixed signals or ill-defined commitments leave too much leeway to be credible.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, ambiguous signals can also lead to credibility for some reasons. First, signals “are not automatically accepted, especially when the perceiver has reason to believe a state would like an image accepted.”<sup>19</sup> If so, a challenger is more likely to disregard the most clear-cut messages, since they are too explicit to believe. Second, ambiguity “creates anxiety in the opponent”, and thus engage adversary worst case analysis.<sup>20</sup> If so, the challenger is more prone to retreat, and deterrent efforts are likely to succeed. Third, ambiguity makes it easier for a challenger to “save face” and thus to comply.<sup>21</sup>

The effectiveness of verbal and non-verbal signals has also been debated. Language could be powerful and costly when connected with reputation, such as when issuing an ultimatum.<sup>22</sup> However, nonverbal signals may be more credible because verbal messages can enable be manipulated to hide unfavorable interests and capabilities.<sup>23</sup> Bluffing, for instance, has a tempting “price/performance ratio.” Therefore, ordinary diplomatic statements could be no more than pale sheets of paper.<sup>24</sup>

## CLEAR-CUT SIGNALS AS THE BETTER CHOICE

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), pp. 40-41; Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 246; Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, p. 48; Oran R. Young, *The Politics of Force: Bargaining During International Crises* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 177; Deborah Welch Larson, *Anatomy of Mistrust: U.S.-Soviet Relations During the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 31.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 11, pp. 130-131.

<sup>20</sup> Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense*, pp. 246-248.

<sup>21</sup> Crawford, “The Endurance of Extended Deterrence,” p. 290.

<sup>22</sup> Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>23</sup> Young, *The Politics of Force*, p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, pp. 137,150; Young, *The Politics of Force*, p. 177; John Arquilla, “Louder Than Words: Tacit Communication in International Crises,” *Political Communication*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (1992), pp. 155-172.

There are four key ways to signal a message: clearly, or vaguely, and in diplomatic words or in military maneuvers.<sup>25</sup> A clear-cut verbal signal formalizes in propaganda, public statements and speeches on a proposed retaliation against challenger's attack. A non-verbal signal always involves military maneuvers and war preparation efforts to reinforce verbal signals. In contrast, ambiguous signals veil a defender's intentions, which can be statements with blended demands and secret military maneuvers.

Of these four ways, a clear-cut signals, in words or in deed, is a better choice to make extended deterrent attempts credible for three reasons. First, communication between adversaries will be in decline during crises, and information processing is always simplified that "only a small part of the relevant information will penetrate to the conscious level."<sup>26</sup> Explicit signals can partially solve the information processing problem by making adversaries have more nuanced understanding of deterrent threats in the first place and then expect to receive more such signals from the defender at various stages in a crisis. In other words, a challenger will become more cautious when receiving clear-cut signals and the cautiousness will be reinforced by subsequent signals of the same kind. Second, clear-cut verbal signals draw a line for a challenger to estimate the balance of *interests*, and thus affect the balance of *motivation* or *resolve*. If BOI does not favor a defender, for instance, explicitly referring to its interests through propaganda and diplomatic activities can bolster credibility. Although explicit signals guarantee no success, extended deterrence is more likely to fail without them. Third, the most effective signals always combines clear-cut verbal and nonverbal signals, since together the

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<sup>25</sup> Statesmen can also signal intentions publicly or privately. Private threats can be equally effective as public threats. See Shuhei Kurizaki, "Efficient Secrecy: Public versus Private Threats in Crisis Diplomacy," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 101, No. 3 (2007), pp. 543-558.

<sup>26</sup> Ole R. Holsti, *Crisis, Escalation, War* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972), p. 82; Jack Snyder, *The Psychology of Escalation: Sino-Soviet Relations, 1958-1963* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1978), p. 8.

messages generate a powerful indication of the defender's interests *and* capability, eliminating the inherent ambiguous impression of extended deterrent attempts. A challenger has no choice but to consider those costly signals seriously because the defender has demonstrated resolve and capabilities in a variety of ways.

The relationship between BOC and the objective nature of signals is more complicated. First, if BOC favors the defender, clear-cut actions imply both strong resolve and sufficient preparation in conveying threats. If words are not effective, the defender can subsequently escalate through limited military operations or exemplary use of force to signal its seriousness. Second, with the combination of clear-cut signals, a favorable BOC, although still important, becomes less necessary. It is true there is no guarantee of the defender's success only depending upon explicit signals, nevertheless, a disadvantaged defender's clear signals can better elicit the challenger's worst-case calculation than an advantaged defender's ambiguous signals, and therefore make the deterrence more likely to work.

## **CASE SELECTION**

To understand contextual factors and interpret evidence, detailed case studies are essential.<sup>27</sup> In addition, structured focused comparison is a useful means to eliminate alternative explanations and find the most important variables across space and time.

"The set of cases must be large enough to enhance the external validity and robustness of

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<sup>27</sup> Janice Gross Stein, "Extended Deterrence in the Middle East: American Strategy Reconsidered," *World Politics*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (April 1987), pp. 328-329; Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, "Deterrence: The Elusive Dependent Variable," *World Politics*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (April 1990), pp. 353-356.

the results, but it cannot be so large as to make detailed research impossible.”<sup>28</sup> Cases are selected from extreme high or low values on casual variables with data richness to identify casual relations and make predictions.<sup>29</sup>

This paper will examine three extended deterrence cases involving the PRC (People’s Republic of China) during the Cold War—the Korean War (1950), Vietnam War (1965) and Sino-Vietnamese War (1979). First, independent variables—the clearness/vagueness of extended deterrent signals—all bear extreme values in these cases. As will be discussed in detail, ambiguous signals were applied in different ways in 1950 and 1978, such as blending different demands, secret military maneuvers, and military aid to protégés without covered by propaganda. In contrast, China conveyed clear-cut threats in words and in deeds to deter potential U.S. attacks upon North Vietnam in 1965. Second, it is true that credibility consists of resolve, capability, and interests.<sup>30</sup> As will be discussed nevertheless, neither BOI nor BOC can provide full interpretations of these cases if without consideration of signaling effects. The comparative case studies additionally show that signaling theory has greater explanatory power across space and time in all cases. Third, all three cases posit China in the defensive position during the Cold War, which can help us better understand China’s coercive diplomacy in the past and future.

### **CHINA’S AMBIGUOUS SIGNALS IN 1950**

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<sup>28</sup> Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 25.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> John David Orme, *Deterrence, Reputation and Cold War Cycles* (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 147; Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 15.

## CHINA'S SIGNALS AND U.S. DETERRABILITY

In this case, Beijing's signaling strategy has been put front and center in academia. The first question is when the extended deterrent attempts failed. Answers were not unanimous and relied on inadequate primary sources. This scholarship mistook China's diplomatic and military initiatives in late October 1950 for deterrent threats.<sup>31</sup> In fact, PRC deterrent attempts failed on October 3.<sup>32</sup> China's diplomacy after the date did not represent any extended deterrent threat because China had already decided to intervene.<sup>33</sup>

The second question is more important—was China's extended deterrent commitment well-communicated? Some scholars argue that China skillfully manipulated its signals.<sup>34</sup> However, viewed from a challenger's perspective, China's signals were ineffective. Washington clearly misunderstood most of the major signals, including Chinese leaders' speeches, propaganda, and troop advances. As Allen Whiting puts it, "we cannot say that there was no element of bluff in Chinese pronouncements."<sup>35</sup> More specifically, "if either Russian or Chinese forces had already entered Korea or had announced that they intended to enter, [G]eneral MacArthur should [have] refrain[ed] from moving above the [38th] line."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> George and Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy*, pp. 188-189; Lebow, *Between Peace and War*, p. 95.

<sup>32</sup> Twomey's arguments over the U.S. crossing of the 38th Parallel are invalid because he mainly depends on evidence after October 3. (Mis)perception and (mis)calculations following October 3 could not be *causes* of deterrence failure. See Twomey, *The Military Lens*, pp. 87-133.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas J. Christensen, "Threats, Assurances, and the Last Chance for Peace: The Lessons of Mao's Korean War Telegrams," *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Summer 1992), pp. 122-154.

<sup>34</sup> Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, pp. 54-55; J. H. Kalicki, *The Pattern of Sino-American Crises: Political-military Interactions in the 1950s* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 56.

<sup>35</sup> Allen S. Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1960), pp. 109-110.

<sup>36</sup> James F. Schnabel, *Policy and Direction: The First Year* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), p. 179; James McGovern, *To the Yalu: From the Chinese Invasion of Korea to MacArthur's Dismissal* (New York, NY: Morrow, 1972), pp. 41-42.



To answer the question why China's signals were unreliable, a quick review of the process on both sides of deterrence is helpful. U.S. interests in South Korea were limited. Its priority was to avoid a military defeat in the South and a wider war with China. The CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) commented on June 30 that the implication of a U.S. defeat in Korea would mean that it would "become nearly impossible to develop effective anti-Communist resistance in Southeast Asia".<sup>37</sup> Yet simultaneously, "from a strategic point of view the Korean peninsula is not of such importance to the U.S. that it would be desirable to have large U.S. forces committed there".<sup>38</sup> It should not be forgotten that Washington's primary concern from June to September was still to avoiding a direct military confrontation with Beijing. As President Truman recalled, "every decision I made in connection with the Korean conflict had this one aim in mind: to prevent a third world war."<sup>39</sup> He was therefore "careful not to cause a general Asiatic war" with China.<sup>40</sup> On September 11, Secretary of State Dean Acheson further suggested to President Truman that "the present day policy [i]s directed toward a localization of the conflict in Korea and the avoidance of any unnecessary extension of hostilities or the outbreak of a general war."<sup>41</sup>

China initiated extended deterrent threats following the outbreak of the Korean War on 25 June 1950. Right before the breakdown of China's deterrent efforts, Zhou Enlai, PRC Prime Minister, warned the U.S. through the Indian Ambassador to China, Kavilam Panikkar, on October 3 that U.N. (United Nations) forces, excluding the South

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<sup>37</sup> "Weekly Summary Excerpt, 30 June 1950, The Korean Situation," in Woodrow J. Kuhns, ed., *Assessing the Soviet Threat: The Early Cold War Years* (McLean, VA: Center for the Study of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, 1997), p. 391.

<sup>38</sup> "Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs (Allison)," *FRUS, 1950, Vol. VII*, p. 568.

<sup>39</sup> Truman, *Memoirs*, pp. 333, 345.

<sup>40</sup> Robert H. Ferrell, ed., *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman*, (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1980), p. 185.

<sup>41</sup> "Memorandum by the Secretary of State to the President," *FRUS, 1950, Vol. VII*, p. 721.

Korean Army, should halt at the 38th parallel.<sup>42</sup> President Truman perceived the threat that he called Zhou's above message was a "bald attempt to blackmail".<sup>43</sup> However, China's signals were unbelievable that the CIA concluded that Zhou's warning was "primarily a last-ditch attempt to intimidate the U.S."<sup>44</sup> In fact, a day before, in General MacArthur's instructions to the Eighth Army, the Commander in Chief of the U.N. Command stated that "the so-called 38th parallel accordingly is not the factor in the military employment of our forces. To accomplish the enemy's complete defeat, your troops may cross the parallel at any time either in exploratory probing or exploiting local tactical conditions."<sup>45</sup> Therefore, with its signals ignored, China's deterrent attempts had failed.

## **AMBIGUOUS SIGNALS**

As can be concluded from the case review, ambiguous communication derailed China's deterrent attempts. China mixed three issues together in its verbal signals: warnings against U.S. attacks upon North Korea, admission to the U.N., and border defense. This signaling strategy blundered in many aspects.

### *Ambiguous Words: Incompatible Goals in North Korea and U.N.*

China had two goals in late 1950: protecting North Korea and joining the U.N. In internal discussions, Mao Zedong, PRC Chairman, maintained that a buffer state was the

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<sup>42</sup> ZELZ, pp. 1015-1016.

<sup>43</sup> Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs*., *Years of Trial and Hope* 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956), Vol. 2, p. 362.

<sup>44</sup> "Weekly Summary Excerpt, 6 October 1950, Korea and Soviet Policy; Chinese Communist Problems," in Kuhns, ed., *Assessing the Soviet Threat*, p. 447.

<sup>45</sup> Courtney Whitney, *MacArthur: His Rendezvous with History* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1956), p. 399.

first priority warranted military intervention. From August 4, the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) Politburo discussed a possible North Korean military defeat at Pusan, with Zhou raising the idea of intervention, because “it will be unfavorable to peace, if U.S. imperialists oppress North Koreans. [So] China’s help is irreplaceable.”<sup>46</sup> Mao replied: “If U.S. imperialists get the upper hand, they will grow bold and threaten us. We are obliged to help [North] Koreans by sending Chinese Volunteers.”<sup>47</sup>

Beijing also showed strong interest in joining the U.N. with Soviet support. Chinese leaders prepared to send a delegation for admission in January 1950. The outbreak of the Korean War enhanced Chinese bargaining position because the U.N. wished Beijing could constrain upon Pyongyang in exchange for the admission. On July 1, for example, Panikkar connected the need to localize the Korean conflict with Beijing’s U.N. seat.<sup>48</sup> In an official reply approved by Mao on July 9, Zhou conveyed general agreement with the Indian above point.<sup>49</sup> However, in Chinese eyes, localization of the Korean War meant a “Korean Civil War” without any intervention of great powers from the outside. When North Korea forces outflanked South Korean troops in July, Beijing wished to get the U.N. admission and see Communist victory over the Korean peninsula simultaneously.

China’s two goals were contradictory. Joining the U.N. meant acquiescing in U.N. forces’ deployment in Korea. China claimed it was assisting Korea but at the same time attempted to acknowledge the legitimacy of the U.N, which inevitably undermined its deterrence credibility. However, Beijing seemed to never have understood the

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<sup>46</sup> ZELNP, Vol. I, p. 62.

<sup>47</sup> MZDZ, p. 109.

<sup>48</sup> Kavilam M. Panikkar, *In Two Chinas: Memoirs of a Diplomat* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1955, reprint ed., Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, 1981), pp. 103-104.

<sup>49</sup> Panikkar, *In Two Chinas*, p. 104. For the full-text of Zhou’s reply, see *Zhonggong dangshi ziliao* [Materials of Chinese Communist Party History], Vol. 65 (February 1998), pp. 1-2.

contradiction. Zhou publicly criticized the Chinese Nationalists and tried to replace them in the U.N., while on the other hand, he condemned U.N. military operations in Korea. For example, in a public statement on September 24, he stated that the “[U.N.] has already been degenerated into a tool for the U.S. government to cover up its intentions of invading China and enlarging the war [in Korea]. Peace-loving people around the world should not sit idly by these crimes.”<sup>50</sup>

The mixed signals did not work well. As General Bradley argued, “it was especially difficult to sort out [Red China’s] real intentions from propagandistic threats.”<sup>51</sup> To U.S. policymakers, China’s acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the U.N. resolutions indicated abandonment of North Korean interests. As the CIA concluded on September 8, “Chinese Communist intervention would probably eliminate all prospects for China’s admission to the United Nations.”<sup>52</sup> This inference was immediately supported by Secretary Acheson on September 10, who confidently alleged that “it would be sheer madness on the part of the Chinese Communists to do that [intervene in Korea],” considering “why they should want to further their own dismemberment [in the United Nations]?”<sup>53</sup> The Consul General in Hong Kong on September 23 offered his opinion that “signs of Peking’s [Beijing’s] paramount interest in gaining entry to UN were Chou [Zhou] Enlai’s telegrams to UN branding as violation of charter Security Council’s rejection of demand for admission Chinese Communist representative and demanding unseating Nationalist delegation in assembly in favor Chinese Communists. Editorials on

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<sup>50</sup> *JGYLZELWG, Vol. III*, pp. 219-220.

<sup>51</sup> Omar N. Bradley and Clay Blair, *A General’s Life: An Autobiography* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 561.

<sup>52</sup> “Intelligence Memorandum 324, 8 September 1950, Probability of Direct Chinese Communist Intervention in Korea,” in Kuhns, ed., *Assessing the Soviet Threat*, p. 435.

<sup>53</sup> “Foreign Policies Toward Asia: A Television Interview with Secretary Acheson, Released to the press September 10,” in *DSB*, Vol. 23, No. 585, p. 463.

[the] UN in Peking *People's Daily* and Hong Kong *Wen Hui Pao* lent support to view that Peking making all-out effort get into U.N.”<sup>54</sup> Washington then reached the conclusion that China's determination to join the U.N. outweighed interests in protecting North Korea, mistakenly inferring that crossing the 38th parallel would not elicit PRC retaliation.

*Ambiguous Words: Border Defense as Noises*

Apart from the two conflicting pressing demands, China's signals included a third condemn: protests against air and violations of PRC territory. A typical mixed signal was Zhou's public accusation on August 30, condemning American intrusions in China's airspace but also called Washington to withdraw from Korea.<sup>55</sup> Zhou's prime concern was indeed North Korea, manifested in his urging the U.N. to “apply sanctions against U.S. aggressive war crimes, and immediately withdraw all the forces from Korea, including the air and naval forces.”<sup>56</sup> But was violation of Chinese territory really harmful to PRC's vital interests? Indeed, protests against U.S. border violations were propaganda efforts to show that China was a “victim” of U.S. “aggression”. Mao therefore expressed impatience over the protests. On September 16, he stated in internal discussions that “it will be a nuisance to protest each time an incursion occurs. It seems more appropriate to make one protest every ten days or two weeks over all the incursions that have occurred during that period.”<sup>57</sup> Had territorial violations been part of China's vital interests, Mao would have protested such violation immediately when it occurred.

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<sup>54</sup> “The Consul General at Hong Kong (Wilkinson) to the Secretary of State,” *FRUS, 1950, Vol. VII*, p. 765.

<sup>55</sup> *JGYLZELWG, Vol. III*, p. 218.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 329-330.

<sup>57</sup> *JGYLMZDWG, Vol. I*, p. 522. For English translations, see “Memorandum, Mao Zedong to Zhou Enlai, 16 September 1950,” in Zhang Shuguang and Chen Jian, eds., *Chinese Communist Foreign Policy and the Cold War in*

However, the mixed signals complicated U.S. interpretations of Chinese interests. Washington deduced that, since territorial violations aroused protests, Beijing would not mind operations beyond its border, although it might intervene. Contrary to China's expectation, warnings regarding North Korea were treated as noise. On September 15, the CIA noted that "decisive Chinese Communist intervention, either direct or indirect, is thus unlikely. [C]harges of U.S. border violations and aggression [f]it into the 'peace' propaganda campaign."<sup>58</sup> Washington consequently assumed that the *Yalu* River was the bottom line, and therefore disregarded China's extended deterrent threats and crossed the 38th parallel. Alan Goodrich Kirk, U.S. ambassador to Moscow, judged on September 30 that "Chinese Communists, through propaganda [i]n the hope of bluffing the U.N. on the 38th parallel issue."<sup>59</sup> After analyzing Zhou's speech on September 30, CIA handed in a report on October 6 suggesting that China's warnings were "an attempt of bluff the U.N. into not crossing the 38th parallel, rather than a forewarning of Chinese intervention."<sup>60</sup>

### *Ambiguous Actions: Delayed Assistance*

The advance of U.S. forces soon vanquished North Korean resistance following the Inchon Landing on September 15. As Matvei Vasilevich Zakharov, Soviet representative in Pyongyang, reported on September 26, the situation left him extremely pessimistic and defense of Seoul and Pusan was nearly hopeless.<sup>61</sup> Facing such losses, Kim Il-sung, North Korean Prime Minister, was under great stress. On September 30, according to Soviet Ambassador Shtykov in Pyongyang, Kim had almost no divisions to

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*Asia: New Documentary Evidence, 1944-1950* (Chicago, IL: Imprint Publications, 1996), p. 160.

<sup>58</sup> "Weekly Summary Excerpt, 15 September 1950, Soviet/Communist Activity," in Kuhns, ed., *Assessing the Soviet Threat*, pp. 437-438.

<sup>59</sup> "Weekly Summary Excerpt, 30 September 1950, Possible Chinese Intervention in Korea," *Ibid.*, pp. 443-444.

<sup>60</sup> "Weekly Summary Excerpt, 6 October 1950, Korea and Soviet Policy; Chinese Communist Problems," *Ibid.*, p. 448.

<sup>61</sup> *CXZZ, Vol. II*, p. 550.

send to the 38th parallel, and new divisions would be poorly equipped.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, Kim was left with less than four divisions by October 20.<sup>63</sup>

Washington took Beijing's non-involvement in Korea following September 15 as unwillingness to intervene. Had China fought back when General MacArthur was successful and defended the 38th parallel, more time would have been seized for North Koreans to retreat from the south. China was more than prepared by then, as the U.S. understood this. By mid-September, at least 250,000 troops had been deployed along the Sino-Korean border, many of them armed with Soviet military equipment, and they had trained in this area for nearly three months. China's war preparation effort, albeit unconfirmed and imprecise, had been noted by the U.S. However, China chose to keep quiet. On September 20, it did nothing but praise Kim's brave and courageous fighters.<sup>64</sup>

China came to realize that extended deterrent attempts might come to naught in late September. Zhou on September 29 explicitly reminded Mao that "there is no [North Korean] military force beyond the [38th] parallel. [Therefore,] there is a possibility that the enemy will directly attack and occupy Pyongyang."<sup>65</sup> Although Mao would have preferred to strengthening China's extended deterrent posture, his assertion that "we have decided to send some of our troops [several divisions] to Korea" on October 1 was not sent to Moscow.<sup>66</sup> Mao, in fact, told Soviet Ambassador Roshchin on October 2 that "many CCP Politburos believe we should act cautiously [*jinshen xingshi*]. [T]he best

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 561.

<sup>63</sup> Yang Hongyong, *Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun lishi jishi: heping niandai de xiaoyan* [*The Historical Records of Chinese People's Liberation Army, Smoke of Gunpowder during the Peacetime*] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1997), p. 64.

<sup>64</sup> *MZDZ*, p. 111; *JGYLZELWG*, Vol. III, pp. 311-312.

<sup>65</sup> *MZDZ*, p. 111; *ZELJSWX*, Vol. IV, p. 58.

<sup>66</sup> *MZDZ*, p. 114. For English translations, see "Mao Telegram to Stalin re the Decision to Send Troops to Korea, Oct. 2, 1950," in Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 275.

option is not to intervene, [at least] temporarily, and then to have further preparations.”<sup>67</sup>

Two alternatives offer explanations. Chinese leadership in general might accept deterrence failure, and Mao was in purist of substantial Soviet aid before intervention.

More importantly, China still signaled nothing publicly about its military preparations to the U.S., showing a tendency of “standing idly by.” Washington, on reasonable grounds, predicted Beijing’s intervention, if any, should have been prior to U.S. military achievements South of the 38th line. Director of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs on August 12, before the Inchon Landing, argued that “when U.N. forces begin to have military successes, then will be the time to look for [e]ntry of Chinese Communist forces.”<sup>68</sup> However this expectation was never confirmed by China’s words and deeds. On China’s side, nothing changed, except that time passed. Consequently, Washington believed that Beijing might not intervene at all. Upon receiving Zhou’s warnings on October 2, General J. Lawton Collins, Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, disregarded the message. As he recalled, “if the Chinese were serious, they would disclose their intentions in advance.”<sup>69</sup> Also, on October 3, Walter Bedell Smith—the head of the CIA—reported to the White House that “there are no convincing indications of an actual Chinese Communist intention to resort to full-scale intervention in Korea. [F]rom a military standpoint, [t]he most favorable time militarily for intervention [when we had hanging on in the Pusan perimeter] had passed.”<sup>70</sup> As some U.S. diplomats later pointed out, “Zhou’s October message to the US was not credited. [T]he message came too late.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *CXZZ*, Vol. II, pp. 576-577.

<sup>68</sup> “Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Northeast Asian Affairs (Allison),” *FRUS*, 1950, Vol. VII, p. 568.

<sup>69</sup> Collins, *War in Peacetime*, p. 173.

<sup>70</sup> Bradley and Blair, *A General’s Life*, p. 567.

<sup>71</sup> Marshall Green, John H. Holdridge, and William N. Stokes, *War and Peace with China: First-hand Experiences in*



*Ambiguous Actions: Hidden Military Maneuvers*

From June to October, Beijing mobilized hundreds of thousands of troops along the Sino-Korean border. However, not a word slipped out to the media. On July 7, Chinese leaders sent two CORPS [39th and 40th] to the Sino-Korean border.<sup>72</sup> On July 22, Mao deployed 124 MiG jet fighters to protect Chinese military maneuvers and industrial bases.<sup>73</sup> Meanwhile, Zhou reported to Mao that three CORPS were moving to the border with three additional anti-aircraft regiments.<sup>74</sup> On August 27, Mao additionally instructed that China should assemble 12 CORPS for emergency.<sup>75</sup> On September 8, Mao gave further directives on the northward movement of the entire Ninth Army.<sup>76</sup> No sign of military movements appeared in any propaganda or in private talks with diplomats except the Soviets.

Consequently, Washington never managed to realize the gravity of China's deterrent signals. China's first decisive warning came from Nie Rongzhen, the Deputy Chief of the General Staff, on September 25. Nie told Panikkar: "We know what we are in for, but [at] all costs American aggression has to be stopped." However, Nie told Panikkar in "a quiet and unexcited manner." Inferring from this manner and Nie's omission of China's military retaliation, Panikkar thought his words did not mean what

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*the Foreign Service of the United States* (Bethesda, MD: DACOR Press, 1994), p. 33.

<sup>72</sup> Xu Yan, *Diyci jiaoliang: Kangmei yuanchao zhanzheng de lishi huigu yu fansi* [*The First Confrontation: The Historical Review and Reflections of the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and to Aid Korea*] (Beijing: Zhongguo guangbo dianshi chubanshe, 1990), p. 16.

<sup>73</sup> *CXZZ*, Vol. II, p. 483.

<sup>74</sup> *NRZNP*, Vol. I, p. 528.

<sup>75</sup> *Mao Zedong junshi huodong jishi* [*Chronicle of Mao Zedong's Military Activities*] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1994), p. 841.

<sup>76</sup> *JGYLMZDWG*, Vol. I, p. 498. For English translations, see "Mao Comment on the Ninth Army's Orders, Sep. 8, 1950," in Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue, *Uncertain Partners*, p. 273.

they literally meant.<sup>77</sup> The second and most important warning came from Zhou at midnight on October 2, who warned that “American intrusion into North Korea would encounter Chinese resistance.”<sup>78</sup> According to Chinese and Indian sources, Zhou gave no details of what kinds of resistance and retaliatory measures China would employ, be they military counterattacks or other serious measures.

Because Beijing’s concealed mobilization did not effectively communicated, it could not signal its commitment to retaliate. First, Washington was confused over the direction of Chinese military mobilization. On September 12, according to the Netherlands Chargé d’Affaires in Beijing, “as example their conflicting natures said 200,000 troops reported moving northward and over 50,000 moving south in direction Indochina border. [A]bsolutely no reports from Peking Charge confirming these reported troop movements towards Manchurian-Korean border.”<sup>79</sup> Even as late as September 27, Washington still could not understand how and when Beijing had mobilized its troops. State Department officials had to admit that “there is nonetheless no guarantee that the Chinese Communist effort will not be thrust forth in another direction, toward the north or south, or at least toward the occupation of Quemoy and Matzu [islands in the South].”<sup>80</sup>

Second, Washington found no confirmation of Chinese military maneuvers from its deterrent signals, and thus doubted Chinese intention to intervene. Indeed, while Washington had expected to receive a Chinese message on military movements as U.S.

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<sup>77</sup> Panikkar, *In Two Chinas*, p. 108.

<sup>78</sup> ZELZ, pp. 1015-1016; Panikkar, *In Two Chinas*, pp. 109-111. For English translations of Zhou’s conversation, see “Minute, Zhou Enlai’s Talk with K. M. Panikkar, 3 October 1950,” in Zhang and Chen, eds., *Chinese Communist Foreign Policy and the Cold War in Asia*, p. 164.

<sup>79</sup> “The Ambassador in the Netherlands (Chapin) to the Secretary of State,” *FRUS, 1950, Vol. VII*, pp. 723-724.

<sup>80</sup> “Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Chinese Affairs (Clubb) to the Assistant Secretary of States for Far Eastern Affairs (Rusk),” *FRUS, 1950, Vol. VII*, p. 795.

troops approached the 38th parallel.<sup>81</sup> Washington therefore on September 8 concluded that Chinese actions in Korea would be “more indirect.”<sup>82</sup> On October 3, upon receiving Zhou’s warning, the CIA estimated that Beijing “would not consider it in their interests to intervene openly in Korea if, as now seems likely, they anticipate that war with the U.N. nations would result.”<sup>83</sup>

## TESTING COMPETING THEORIES

### *Balance of Interests?*

BOI argues that “the salience of a particular region for a major power’s national interests indicates the inherent credibility of its (Defender’s) threat to retaliate if another major power (Challenger) attacks the third nation (Protégé) is located, such as political-military, diplomatic and alliance ties, or the degree of economic interdependence.”<sup>84</sup> The defender thus has a high chance of winning deterrence in this case, however, failed. Though asymmetric interests highly favored Beijing, Washington did not perceive this advantage, and assumed that “legitimate Chinese interests were in no way threatened by U.S. action in Korea,” if it crossed the 38th parallel.<sup>85</sup>

This denial of Beijing’s interests did not come overnight. From July to August, Washington gave every credit to Beijing’s vital interests in the area. Any move beyond

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<sup>81</sup> For example, see “Memorandum of Conversations, by the Director of the Office of United Nations Political and Security Affairs (Bancroft),” *FRUS, 1950, Vol. VII*, p. 760.

<sup>82</sup> “Intelligence Memorandum 324, 8 September 1950, Probability of Direct Chinese Communist Intervention in Korea,” in Kuhns, ed., *Assessing the Soviet Threat*, p. 433.

<sup>83</sup> “Daily Summary Excerpt, 3 October 1950, Possible Chinese Communist Intervention in Korea,” in *Ibid.*, p. 445.

<sup>84</sup> Danilovic, *When the Stakes are High*, p. 4.

<sup>85</sup> Robert R. Simmons, *The Strained Alliance: Peking, Pyongyang, Moscow, and the Politics of the Korean Civil War* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1975), pp. 154-168; Bevin Alexander, *Korea: The First War We Lost* (New York, NY: Hippocrene, 1986), pp. 232-233; Rosemary Foot, *The Wrong War: American Policy and the Dimensions of the Korean Conflict, 1950-1953* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 82; Burton I. Kaufman, *The Korean War: Challenges in Crisis, Credibility, and Command* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Companies, 1997), pp. 59-60.

the 38th parallel was taken with great care. On July 22, the State Department's Policy Planning Staff submitted a report stating that "if U.N. forces were to continue military ground action north of the 38th parallel, [t]he danger of conflict with Chinese communists [w]ould be greatly increased. [W]e should make every effort to restrict military ground action to the area south of the 38th parallel."<sup>86</sup> President Truman approved a policy statement in the NSC (National Security Council) meeting at the end of August that "no ground operations were to take place north of 38th parallel in the event of Soviet or Chinese Communist entry."<sup>87</sup>

The challenger's vigilance, alas, did not seal the defender's deterrent attempt with success. After receiving ambiguous signals from Beijing, Washington began to question the credibility of China's threats, and eventually discredited Beijing's focus on the 38th parallel. According to Panikkar, Zhou on July 21 made it quite clear that "Chinese had every intention of avoiding implication in present hostilities [in Korea]."<sup>88</sup> This report was considered valid by the U.S. even in late September. Secretary Acheson recalled that, during September, "we continued to seek evidence of Chinese interventions toward Korea. [P]anikkar reported Chou [Zhou] En-lai as emphasizing China's peaceable intentions, in which the Indian agreed."<sup>89</sup> On September 21, Panikkar commented that Zhou "has continuously emphasized peaceful intentions. [A]s regards Korea, they have shown no undue interest beyond expression of sympathy. [I]n the circumstances direct participation of China in Korean fighting seems beyond range of possibility. [I]'m satisfied that China by herself will not interfere in the conflict."<sup>90</sup> As a matter of fact,

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<sup>86</sup> "Draft Memorandum Prepared by the Policy Planning Staff," *FRUS, 1950, Vol. VII*, p. 453.

<sup>87</sup> Truman, *Memoirs*, p. 359.

<sup>88</sup> "The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Douglas) to the Secretary of State," *FRUS, 1950, Vol. VII*, pp. 488-489.

<sup>89</sup> Dean Acheson, *The Korean War* (New York, NY: Norton, 1971), pp. 54-55.

<sup>90</sup> "The Ambassador in India (Henderson) to the Secretary of State," *FRUS, 1950, Vol. VII*, p. 742.

Americans generally agreed with their Indian counterparts. On none of these occasions, did Washington hit on China's real stance on intervention. Therefore, vigilance was abandoned and deterrence failed.

### *Balance of Capabilities?*

BOC believes that relative capability plays a significant role in deterrence outcomes. In Korea's case, Washington's underestimation of the possibility of defeat by Beijing's military capabilities contributed to the PRC's deterrence failure.<sup>91</sup> Did the U.S. really underestimate Beijing's capabilities and ignore Beijing's signals, however?

Although Washington's evaluation varied significantly, top-secret reports tell us that the Truman Administration always believed in China's capability to intervene. The actual number of Chinese troops along the border was 250,748 by the end of July, consisting of four CORPS [38th, 39th, 40th and 42nd].<sup>92</sup> On the other side, American estimated of their number were also frightening. On July 6, at a NSC meeting, Secretary of the Army Frank Pace said that it was estimated there were two hundred thousand Chinese Communist troops in Manchuria.<sup>93</sup> On the same day, the joint intelligence committee estimated that there were 565,000 Chinese communist troops in Manchuria. General Charles A. Willoughby, General Macarthur's intelligence chief, estimated that there were 489,000 in Manchuria and 176,000 in North China, a quarter of them [115,000] "regulars", the other three quarters "militia".<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Foot, *The Wrong War*, p. 82; Zhang Shuguang, *Deterrence and Strategic Culture: Chinese-American Confrontations, 1949-1958* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 85-88.

<sup>92</sup> *Kangmei yuanchao zhanzheng shi, diyijuan* [The History of the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and to Aid Korea, Vol. I] (Beijing: junshi kexue chubanshe, 2000), p. 67.

<sup>93</sup> Truman, *Memoirs*, p. 344.

<sup>94</sup> Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, pp. 561-562.

Later, Beijing increased the number of troops again, and Washington perceived the threat. On August 31, Zhou proposed that 700,000 troops in 11 Armies [36 divisions] were insufficient, so reserves of 100,000 veterans were called up.<sup>95</sup> On September 3, Zhou submitted a written report on preparing 200,000 troops as reserves, which Mao approved.<sup>96</sup> On the American side, the Department of the Army estimated on August 30 that the total of Chinese regular forces might be approximately 256,000, comprising nine armies of 37 divisions.<sup>97</sup> General Willoughby reported the total of regulars had doubled again to 450,000 by August 31.<sup>98</sup> On September 8, the CIA estimated that there were “approximately 565,000 Military District [soldiers] in Manchuria.”<sup>99</sup> U.S. field commanders, though achieving military success following the Inchon Landing, found it more scared when they noted that three Chinese army groups with a total of twenty-seven divisions, on a rough estimate between 250,000 and 300,000 troops, had been deployed up to the *Yalu* River.<sup>100</sup> In a nutshell, Washington took Beijing’s military maneuvers quite seriously.

The failure of PRC deterrence cannot be attributed to insufficient capability because in reality, the U.S. did not underestimate China’s capabilities, and had engaged in a worst case scenario on China’s ability to intervene. Rather deterrence failure reflected U.S. assessment of the PRC resolve. On June 30, the CIA assessed China as “not likely” to launch military operations in Korea, although capable of doing so.<sup>101</sup> Due to lack of confirmation on China’s military maneuvers along the Sino-Korean border, the CIA

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<sup>95</sup> Xu, *Diyici jiaoliang*, p. 19.

<sup>96</sup> ZELZ, pp. 1018-1019; ZENLJWX, Vol. IV, pp. 51-53.

<sup>97</sup> “Memorandum of a Teletype Conference Prepared by the Department of Army,” *FRUS*, 1950, Vol. VII, pp. 659-660.

<sup>98</sup> Bradley and Blair, *A General’s Life*, pp. 561-562.

<sup>99</sup> “Intelligence Memorandum 324, 8 September 1950, Probability of Direct Chinese Communist Intervention in Korea,” in Kuhns, ed., *Assessing the Soviet Threat*, pp. 434-435.

<sup>100</sup> David Halberstam, *The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War* (New York, NY: Hyperion, 2007), p. 314.

<sup>101</sup> “Intelligence Memorandum 31, 30 June 1950, Estimates of Soviet Intentions of Capabilities for Military Aggression,” in Kuhns, ed., *Assessing the Soviet Threat*, p. 391.

mistakenly concluded on July 7 “reported movements of large troop formations from South and Central China toward the Northeast are largely discounted.”<sup>102</sup> As General Bradley testified on China’s intentions, “we had the information that they [Chinese Communists] had capability, [b]ut we did not have any intelligence to the positive effect that they were going to intervene.”<sup>103</sup> Therefore, BOC has insufficient explanatory power for the extended deterrence failure.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is apparent that in China’s extended deterrent attempts in 1950, ambiguous words and deeds were the factors that directly undermining credibility. The threats of intervention, supposed to be powerful, were diluted by the issue of U.N. admission issue and protests against border violations. Moreover, Beijing’s delay in taking military action let go the last chance to strengthen extended deterrent effect. Even after losing this chance, Beijing was still unsure whether to present its military forces as a demonstration of its political determination. Ambiguity led to disagreements in Washington on Beijing’s intentions, even though Chinese interests and military capabilities were acknowledged. Signaling techniques therefore offer a more convincing explanation than BOI or BOC in this case.

## CHINA’S CLEAR-CUT SIGNALS IN 1965

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<sup>102</sup> “Weekly Summary Excerpt, 7 July 1950, The Korean Situations and Capabilities,” in *Ibid.*, pp. 407-408.

<sup>103</sup> U.S. Congress, *Military Situation in the Far East: Hearings before the Committee on Armed Services Committee on Foreign Relations United Senate, Vol. II* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1951, reprinted New York: Arno Press, 1979), p. 759.

## CHINA'S SIGNALS AND U.S. DETERRABILITY

A crucial debate over this case must be settled. Some scholars deny the deterrent relationship among Beijing, Washington, and Hanoi in 1965.<sup>104</sup> However, as will be discussed later, U.S. had intention to escalate the Vietnam War in 1965 even under China's threats, while was deterred out of the land invasion. Dean Rusk, U.S. Secretary of State, recalled that "the chances of Chinese intervention were high, and for that reason I strongly opposed U.S. ground operations against North Vietnam. [T]he possibility of Chinese intervention definitely influenced how we fought this war."<sup>105</sup>

Current scholarship in explaining China's deterrence success, despite having merits, is insufficient. James Hershberg and Chen Jian described China's signals through diplomatic channels to Washington in 1965.<sup>106</sup> Successful as their descriptions might be, the above question could not be fully answered if without examining how China signaled nonverbal messages. Some scholars, such as Yuen Foong Khong, view this case within a historical context, arguing that China's repeated references to the Korean War in its signals trapped U.S. in its own fears.<sup>107</sup> Khong is correct in pointing out the importance

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<sup>104</sup> Chen Jian, "Personal Historical Puzzles about China and the Vietnam War," in Odd Arne Westad et al., 77 *Conversations between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in Indochina, 1964-1977*, *Cold War International History Project Working Paper*, No. 22. May 1998, p. 28, hereafter cited as 77 *Conversations*; Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: the Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), p. xviii, p. 379; Fredrik Logevall, "'There Ain't Do Daylight': Lyndon Johnson and the Politics of Escalation," in Mark Philip Bradley and Marilyn B. Young, eds., *Making Sense of the Vietnam Wars: Local, National, and Transnational Perspectives* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 93-94.

<sup>105</sup> Dean Rusk, *As I Saw It* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1990), pp. 456-457.

<sup>106</sup> James G. Hershberg and Chen Jian, "Informing the Enemy: Sino-American 'Signaling' and the Vietnam War, 1965," in Priscilla Roberts, ed., *Behind the Bamboo Curtain: China, Vietnam, and the World beyond Asia* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 193-257.

<sup>107</sup> Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 136; Allen S. Whiting, "U.S. Crisis Management Vis-à-vis China: Korea and Vietnam," in Michael D. Swaine and Zhang Tuosheng, eds., *Managing Sino-American Crises: Case Studies and Analysis* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), pp. 215-249.



China's reputation in this the case, but had he considered the disparity between the clear signals in 1965 and the ambiguous ones in 1950, the answer would be different.

In this case, North Vietnam was China's protégé, and was threatened by the Johnson Administration, whose primary concerns were to maintain South Vietnam and avoid a confrontation with China. As Defense Secretary Robert McNamara concluded on 20 July 1965, "We want to create these conditions, if possible, without causing the war to expand into one with China [a]nd in a way which preserves support [o]f our allies and friends."<sup>108</sup> For the US, maintaining South Vietnam as a non-communist state was part of an undeniable responsibility to protect all Southeast Asia against Communist infiltration. As a memorandum by NSC on February 7 emphasized that "The stakes in Vietnam are extremely high. [T]he internal prestige of the United States, and a substantial part of our influence, are directly at risk in Vietnam. There is no way of unloading the burden on the Vietnamese themselves."<sup>109</sup> The other goal that Washington endeavored to achieve was to avert a direct military confrontation with China. President Johnson issued a caveat against "the use of American ground troops in Asia" on February 10.<sup>110</sup> The two goals might contradict each other because Washington might have to confront Beijing to achieve its ambitions in Vietnam. China issued stern warnings, including clear-cut propagandistic threats, publicly offering substantial aid to North Vietnam, and broadcasting its war preparations—in short, it sent its commitment through every possible channel.

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<sup>108</sup> "Reference File, Vietnam, Box 2, LBJ Library," in David M. Barrett, ed., *Lyndon B. Johnson's Vietnam Papers: A Documentary Collection* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), p. 214.

<sup>109</sup> "Memorandum From the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to President Johnson," *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. II*, p. 175.

<sup>110</sup> "Diary Entry by the Ambassador to the United Kingdom," *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. II*, p. 213.

The United States was deterrable. As a memorandum by a NSC Staffer stated on 10 February 1965 the fundamental question was whether South Vietnam was “really worth the high probability of a land war with China.”<sup>111</sup> The answer was given by President Johnson on February 17, who stated that he sought “no wider war”.<sup>112</sup> China’s deterrent efforts gained full success by the end of July 1965, as indicated by President Johnson’s rejection of any proposal of further escalation—particularly advancing beyond the 17th parallel. At a White House meeting on July 22, the President stated that, “If we gave Westmoreland all he asked for what are our chances? I don’t agree that [C]hina won’t come in.”<sup>113</sup> He turned down the proposal “to destroy North Vietnam utterly and totally by unleashing the full might of America’s war power” on July 27.<sup>114</sup> One month later, Chinese leaders acknowledged the success of deterrence. On August 20, Zhou informed Zambian delegates optimistically that the “Vietnam War will not be escalated into a world war, and if this is true, Vietnam is able to withstand the suffering. The United States cannot win this round against China, so other countries will not be involved.”<sup>115</sup> By this point, Chinese leaders, although still concerned about the security of North Vietnam, had achieved their major goal—maintaining Hanoi as a security buffer.

## CLEAR-CUT SIGNALS

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<sup>111</sup> “Memorandum from James C. Thomson Jr., of the National Security Council Staff to Chester Cooper of the National Security Council Staff,” *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. II*, p. 229.

<sup>112</sup> “U.S. Objective in Viet-Nam, Remarks by President Johnson,” in *DSB*, Vol. LII, No. 1341, p. 333.

<sup>113</sup> “Meeting Files, Box 1, LBJ Library,” in David M. Barrett, ed., *Lyndon B. Johnson’s Vietnam Papers*, p. 236.

<sup>114</sup> Carl Albert, *Little Giant: The Life and Times of Speaker Carl Albert* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), pp. 298-299.

<sup>115</sup> *ZELWJHDDSJ*, p. 474.

Unlike its deterrent efforts in the Korean case, China chose maximum clarity this time to deter a ground war in North Vietnam. It implemented a series of measures, overt and covert to enhance its credibility of its threats by, for example, emphasizing its interests through public statements and diplomacy, substantial military aid to Hanoi, and military maneuvers along the Sino-Vietnamese border.

*Clear-cut words: Propagandistic Threats over Specific Interests*

China had been alarmed about war extension to the North, especially when the Johnson Administration dispatched ground forces in the South in February 1965. On February 23, Zhou publicly asserted that “[the Johnson Administration is] intending to extend the war beyond the border of South Vietnam.”<sup>116</sup> China’s bottom line was defending the border of North Vietnam—the 17th parallel, which was apparent in this verbal signal. If U.S. ignored the warnings, China would resort to force and send massive numbers of military personnel to Vietnam. During his visit to Albania, on March 29, Zhou publicly warned that China would “dispatch its own personnel to fight hand in hand with Vietnamese people when they need.”<sup>117</sup> Correspondingly, on April 20, the Sixth Enlarged Session of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress (NPC) adopted a resolution: “China will continue to do everything in its power to give resolute and unreserved support to the Vietnamese people.”<sup>118</sup> Apart from its own media, the message was passed to the diplomats. On May 15, Zhou told the Soviet ambassador that, “We will not sit idly by if the United States extends the war to Indochina.”<sup>119</sup> He also

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<sup>116</sup> *WJDSJ*, Vol. III, pp. 9-10.

<sup>117</sup> *Renmin ribao* [People’s Daily], 31 March 1965. Also, see *ZELWJHDDSJ*, p. 443.

<sup>118</sup> *Renmin ribao* [People’s Daily], 21 April 1965. For English translations, see “Resolute and Unreserved Support for Viet Nam,” *Peking Review*, No. 17 (1965), p. 6.

<sup>119</sup> *ZELJSHDJS*, Vol. II, p. 616.

confided in Amin al-Hafiz, Prime Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic, on June 9 that “China is threatened by the enlargement of the Vietnam War. [But] We will never subject ourselves to this kind of threat.”<sup>120</sup> China’s deterrent efforts through diplomatic channels could not be ignored, despite these messages might not be transferred to the U.S.

U.S. policymakers understood China’s interests at stake. On February 12, George Ball, Under Secretary of State, and Llewellyn Thompson, Ambassador at Large, reported to President Johnson that “Red China would be extremely reluctant to permit Hanoi to suffer unconditional surrender.”<sup>121</sup> When China escalated its deterrent posture, Washington consequently perceived China’s threats. In a report by NIE (National Intelligence Estimate) on May 5, Washington inferred that Beijing’s primary interest was Indochina, and Chinese leaders “have been making preparations for at least limited engagement, and we believe that they should be prepared to risk a major military conflict with the U.S. should they feel China’s vital security interests threatened by U.S. actions.”<sup>122</sup>

Based on this understanding, Washington scrutinized Chinese propaganda to find out how Beijing would protect its protégé, because “CHICOMs (Chinese Communists) will make every effort through propaganda and diplomatic moves to halt U.S. attacks directed against North Vietnam;” and “would feel an increased compulsion to take some dramatic action to counter the impact of U.S. pressures.”<sup>123</sup> Washington therefore gradually deciphered the bottom line of Chinese deterrent attempts. On March 1, the NSC

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<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 617-618. Also see “Zhou Enlai and Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere,” in Westad et al., 77 *Conversations*, p. 86.

<sup>121</sup> “Memorandum From Acting Secretary of State Ball to President Johnson,” *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. II*, p. 258.

<sup>122</sup> “NIE 13-9-65: Communist China’s Foreign Policy,” in National Intelligence Council, ed., *Tracking the Dragon: National Intelligence Estimates on China during the Era of Mao, 1948-1976*, CD-ROM (Pittsburgh, PA: United States Government Printing Office, 2004), p. 2.

<sup>123</sup> “Memorandum From the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense (McNamara),” *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. I*, pp. 904-905.

informed National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy that “Peiping (Beijing) has been its usually unpleasant self, but nothing momentous to note [t]hat we have ‘erased’ the 17th parallel as a demarcation line.”<sup>124</sup> Having analyzed Chinese propaganda for months, a White House paper on April 1 reached a conclusion that “Peiping [Beijing] has stiffened its position within the last week. We still believe that attacks near Hanoi might substantially raise the odds of Peiping coming in with air.”<sup>125</sup> On April 9, intelligence agencies additionally reported China’s public statements were to “deter the U.S. from extending its bombing and increasing its forces in the area.” “[China’s] willingness to go as far as to threaten intervention suggest that the Communists are prepared to take some further steps to fulfill their warnings with token numbers of ‘volunteers’ from other Communist countries.”<sup>126</sup>

#### *Clear-cut Actions: Aid Policy*

China’s aid to North Vietnam, as part of its clear-cut signals to show determination, threatened Washington with the prospect of massive intervention by substantial ground forces. China tried to obtain two objectives—its military aid not only enhanced North Vietnam’s military effectiveness, but also strengthened its position for ground military operations in Indochina.

China’s aid policy was acknowledged by the U.S. According to Pentagon publications, in December 1964, Chinese weapons, including 57mm. and 75mm.

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<sup>124</sup> “Memorandum from Chester L. Cooper of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy),” *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. II*, p. 353.

<sup>125</sup> “Memorandum by the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy),” *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. II*, p. 507.

<sup>126</sup> “USIB Memo: Recent Indications of Communist Intentions in South Vietnam,” in National Intelligence Council, ed., *Estimative Products on Vietnam, 1948-1975*, CD-ROM (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2005), p. 3.

recoilless rifles, dual-purpose machineguns, rocket launchers, large mortars and antitank mines, were delivered to South Vietnam.<sup>127</sup> And Chinese military aid to North Vietnam in 1965 was as much as ten times that in 1964—the number of guns, artillery, cartridges, shells, and motors, had increased by more than 200%, 133%, 160%, 350%, and 250% respectively.<sup>128</sup> China's aid effectively optimized North Vietnamese armaments: "the strength of artillery units doubled that of 1964 and two armored regiments were also established." By May 1965, Vietnamese air-defense artillery units "expanded from 12 regiments and 14 battalions to 21 regiments and 41 battalions."<sup>129</sup>

Washington admitted the military impasse caused by Beijing's full support. Intelligence agencies reported on April 21 that Beijing's aid had boosted Hanoi's determination to "ride out the U.S. bombardment" and "afford further punishment."<sup>130</sup> Secretary McNamara acknowledged the difficulties four days later, stating that even without Beijing's intervention with substantial ground forces [only material aid], winning the Vietnam War would be a "long and difficult road."<sup>131</sup> In addition, a SNIE (Special National Intelligence Estimate) report concluded at the end of April that "[DRV and China] apparently calculate that the DRV can afford further punishment."<sup>132</sup> China therefore enhanced Vietnam's military effectiveness, and meanwhile signaled its deterrent efforts against U.S. escalation.

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<sup>127</sup> *Aggression from the North: The Record of North Viet-Nam's Campaign to Conquer South Viet-Nam*, (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1965), p. 15.

<sup>128</sup> Li Ke and Hao Shengzhang, *Wenhua dageming zhong de renmin jiefangjun* [*The People's Liberation Army during the Great Cultural Revolution*] (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi ziliao chubanshe, 1989), p. 409.

<sup>129</sup> Ang Cheng Guan, *The Vietnam War from the Other Side: The Vietnamese Communists' Perspective*, (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2002), pp. 94-96.

<sup>130</sup> "Memo: Reactions to the U.S. Course of Action in Vietnam," in National Intelligence Council, ed., *Estimative Products on Vietnam*, CD-ROM, p. 1, p. 2.

<sup>131</sup> "Mr. McNamara's News Conference," in *DSB*, Vol. LII, No. 1351, p. 755.

<sup>132</sup> *Pentagon Papers*, Vol. III, pp. 479-480.

Later, Beijing also realized that its aid enabled Hanoi to resist further United States escalation. Zhou delivered a talk on the deterrent effect on May 21, asking: “Will the worst scenario [North Vietnam being invaded] come in an instant? No. That would happen gradually. We all clearly know that our enemy is stalled (*qishang baxia*). U.S. started the air strikes against North Vietnam last August and they have lasted for three months now, but right now it encounters new difficulties. [Washington’s] Achilles’ heel is its ignorance [of the next step].”<sup>133</sup>

#### *Clear-cut Actions: Military Maneuvers*

Apart from military assistance to North Vietnam, China also prepared for an all-out attack by the U.S. It dispatched four divisions of the Guangzhou military and air forces along the Sino-Vietnamese border after August 1964.<sup>134</sup> By August 12, several air force units in the Southern Chinese provinces—Guangdong, Zhejiang, Guangxi and Hainan—were mobilized. Also, new airports were constructed in Guangxi, Yunnan and Guizhou to speed up the redeployment of available fighters along the Sino-Vietnamese border.<sup>135</sup>

U.S. intelligence agencies observed China’s clear-cut troop mobilizations along the Sino-Vietnamese border. According to the SNIE of 4 February 1965, Washington had noticed “the introduction of 50 odd-jet fighters into North Vietnam and the increase of Chinese air strength in the border area from 150 jet fighters to about 350.” Therefore Washington assumed that Beijing was expecting “that these deployments will help deter

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<sup>133</sup> ZELJSWX, Vol. IV, p. 520.

<sup>134</sup> Li Yuan, *Li Yuan huiyilu* [*Li Yuan’s Memoirs*] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2009), p. 318.

<sup>135</sup> Wang Dinglie, ed., *Dangdai zhongguo kongjun* [*Contemporary Chinese Air Forces*] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1989), p. 384.

the U.S. from expanding the war to North Vietnam.”<sup>136</sup> On February 8, Senator Mike Mansfield “raised the questions about possible Chinese intervention,” as he noticed a recent completed airfield in North Vietnam, and concluded that “an increase in at least indirect Chinese intervention is to be anticipated.”<sup>137</sup>

These observations, in combination with China’s explicit propaganda, stimulated U.S. fear of China’s massive intervention with substantial ground forces. From the perspective of China’s signals, escalating and sustaining U.S. bombing could not eliminate the risk of Chinese intervention, let alone further escalation of ground warfare in North Vietnam. On February 13, having witnessed Chinese military mobilization, Ball evaluated the potential for costly U.S.-China military confrontation, and passed to President Johnson these estimates, in which he fully acknowledged the considerable pressures Washington had to face from Beijing’s move of “massive ground forces into North Viet-Nam.” He estimated that Beijing had the capacity to “support 14 Chinese divisions and 8 North Vietnamese divisions,” which would require Washington to “bring in 5 to 8 United States divisions with a total troop strength of 300,000 men.” In conclusion, Ball suggested President Johnson highlight the possibility of Chinese massive intervention and thus “confine strikes to targets.”<sup>138</sup> On February 17, Vice President Humphrey submitted a memorandum to the President, emphasizing that “confrontation with the Chinese Air Force can easily lead to massive [ground] retaliation.”

Consequently, in the first half of 1965, Washington yielded to Chinese threats of large-scale troop intervention. On March 1, Adlai Stevenson, U.N. Ambassador, told

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<sup>136</sup> “SNIE 10-65 Communist Military Capabilities and Near-Term Intentions in Laos and South Vietnam,” in National Intelligence Council, ed., *Estimative Products on Vietnam*, CD-ROM, p. 2.

<sup>137</sup> “Memorandum From Senator Mike Mansfield to President Johnson,” *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. II*, p. 204.

<sup>138</sup> “Memorandum From Acting Secretary of State Ball to President Johnson,” *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. II*, pp. 254, 255, 258, 259.



President Johnson and Secretary Rusk the risks of “appearance of substantial Chicom forces as ‘volunteers’ in North Vietnam” would be high.<sup>139</sup> Therefore, it was understandable that Senator Mansfield expressed support for President Johnson’s rejection of bombing Hanoi-Haiphong on June 5, which might lead to “extension of the war in Asia,” because “the bombing is likely to insure the irreversibility of the Chinese involvement.”<sup>140</sup>

## TESTING COMPETING THEORIES

### *Balance of Interests?*

With Status-quo powers such as Washington and Beijing, BOI argues that neither of them had the intention to cross the 17th parallel and that deterrence success reflected this common interest.<sup>141</sup> From the U.S. side, having compared the cost of a land war against China with its interests in North Vietnam, President Johnson eventually abjured the latter. From China’s perspective, interests in South Vietnam were not vital enough to risk a war. Zhou assured Soviet Prime Minister Kosygin on 5 February 1965 in Beijing that, “we don’t want the escalation of war. ...we don’t want a local war to turn into a world war.”<sup>142</sup> Such understanding of Sino-American interests is reasonable at first glance, but will prove inadequate in two aspects.

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<sup>139</sup> “Negotiations on Vietnam,” in Walter Johnson, ed., *The Papers of Adlai E. Stevenson, Vol. VIII, Ambassador to the United Nations, 1961-1965* (Boston, MA: Little Brown, 1979), p. 723.

<sup>140</sup> “Memorandum From Senator Mike Mansfield to President Johnson,” *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. II*, pp. 725-726.

<sup>141</sup> Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1973), p. 179; Mark Philip Bradley, *Vietnam at War* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 112.

<sup>142</sup> Sergey Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens: The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962-1967* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 144.

First, the compatible Sino-American interests in Vietnam could not be a *cause* of extended deterrent success. President Johnson chose to avoid a war instead of protecting U.S. interests in Vietnam, but that by no means showed that its interests were low. America's interest in North Vietnam was so high that Washington had been at some point quite determined to conquer Hanoi. Once defending South Vietnam outweighed the desire to avoid a war with China, Washington might have to cross the 17th parallel. For example, a report by William P. Bundy, the Chairman of the NSC Working Group on Southeast Asia, advocated defending South Vietnam by "defeating North Viet-Nam and probably Communist China militarily."<sup>143</sup> The NSC also suggested on 24 November 1964 that U.S. aims were indeed unlimited, and it was "determined to continue escalating its pressures to achieve its announced objectives [i.e. in South Vietnam] regardless of the danger of war with Communist China."<sup>144</sup>

Second, BOI is insufficient to explain the greater concern after Washington received Beijing's signals. On 11 February 1965, SNIE analysis discussed the increasing possibility of China's "introduction of large-scale ground force combat units into North Vietnam," stating that "if the U.S. program continued and inflicted severe damage on North Vietnam, the chances of such a movement would rise."<sup>145</sup> On June 12, the CIA assessed the possibility of an intervention "with ground forces in a substantial fashion", and argued that its likelihood would surge "if U.S. ground forces invaded North Vietnam."<sup>146</sup> With signaling theory, the fear was quite reasonable: as the signals conveyed the maximum amount of determination to fight back, Washington was

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<sup>143</sup> *Pentagon Papers*, p. 623.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 654.

<sup>145</sup> "SNIE 10-3-65: Communist Reactions to Possible US Actions," in National Intelligence Council, ed., *Estimative Products on Vietnam*, CD-ROM, p. 10.

<sup>146</sup> "Letter From Director of Central Intelligence Raborn to President Johnson," *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. II*, pp. 768-769.

apprehensive over the chance of a confrontation. Had Beijing not signaled the criticality of the 17th parallel clearly and intensely, the United States would have advanced in North Vietnam. Signaling therefore contributed to China's deterrence success.

### *Balance of Capabilities?*

Many scholars have applied BOC to seek an answer for the extended deterrent success. For example, Allen Whiting argues that China's deterrent threats were credible due to U.S. considerations of Chinese military capability.<sup>147</sup> In such efforts, BOC shows considerable explanatory power. For instance, the question why Washington feared a confrontation before Beijing initiated its deterrent policy seems almost self-evident. On 24 May 1964, the Department of Defense estimated that Beijing and Hanoi had the capabilities to deploy 95,000 troops (9 divisions) in the wet season (May—November) and some 250,000 troops with more armor and artillery in the dry season in Southeast Asia, and “ could simultaneously deploy up to 7 infantry divisions into Burma.”<sup>148</sup> Having acknowledged China's capability to wage a ground war, on 10 February 1965, a NSC memorandum stated that it would be “folly” to “lead us into a land war with China in which our air and naval power would be relatively ineffective.”<sup>149</sup>

However, BOC is insufficient to answer all the questions regarding the success of deterrence. Why, for instance, did Washington disbelieve in massive and immediate intervention by Beijing in the mid-1964? In May 1964, a SNIE report concluded that

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<sup>147</sup> Allen S. Whiting, *The Chinese Calculus of Deterrence: India and Indochina* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2001), p. 189.

<sup>148</sup> “Draft Memorandum for the President Prepared by the Department of Defense,” *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. I*, p. 367.

<sup>149</sup> “SNIE 10-3-64: Probable Communist Reactions to Certain Possible US/GVN Courses of Action,” in National Intelligence Council, ed., *Estimative Products on Vietnam*, CD-ROM, p. 12; Memorandum From James C. Thomson Jr., of the National Security Council Staff to Chester Cooper of the National Security Council Staff,” *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. II*, p. 228.

“Communist China almost certainly would not wish to become involved in hostilities with U.S. forces. It would accordingly proceed with caution, and though it would make various threatening gestures.”<sup>150</sup> Meanwhile, although President Johnson appeared to be more concerned with China’s threats, almost all of his senior advisers, including Rusk, McNamara, and Bundy, preferred to war escalation in Vietnam.<sup>151</sup> Viewed from a signaling perspective, the answer is that China had not signaled its military maneuvers by then. Military advantage cannot speak for itself, but needs to be demonstrated by signals to be understood as expected.

In this case, China had placed clear-cut signals at the center of its deterrent policy. A notable example came when Luo Ruiqing, the PLA (People’s Liberation Army) Chief of Staff, announced on 10 May 1965: “[We] are also prepared to send our men to fight together with the people of Vietnam. Our opposition to U.S. imperialism has always been clear-cut.”<sup>152</sup> As Zhou explained publicly on May 28, “with only 14 million people, South Vietnam can defeat 200,000 American troops. China’s population is 50 times more than that of South Vietnam. We can defeat 10 million American troops.”<sup>153</sup>

The result proved that the contribution of clear-cut signals to BOC cannot be ignored. U.S. estimates of China’s intent spiked in mid-1965 after Beijing publicized its military maneuvers, and the Johnson Administration was much more determined to avoid a confrontation. On June 5, Senator Mansfield argued with Secretary McNamara’s estimate—around 300,000 Americans had to be deployed to deal with Hanoi’s forces if they advanced south—that: “If the expansion goes on to include combat with Chinese

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<sup>150</sup> “Special National Intelligence Estimate,” *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. I*, p. 380.

<sup>151</sup> “Telephone Conversation Between President Johnson and Senator Richard Russell,” *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XXVII*, p. 127.

<sup>152</sup> Lo Jui-ching, *Commorate the Victory over German Fascism! Carry the Struggle against U.S. Imperialism through to the End!* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), p. 29.

<sup>153</sup> *ZELWJHDDSJ*, pp. 456-457.

forces all over Southeast Asia, we had better start thinking in terms of millions.”<sup>154</sup> On June 24, Edmund Rice, Consul General in Hong Kong, made similar suggestions that Washington should “learn what the limits of our capabilities are without getting into a wider and disastrous war.”<sup>155</sup>

As the result of China’s warnings and military deployment, President Johnson rejected proposals for further escalations at a series of White House meetings. On July 22, according to Jack Valenti, a confidant of the President presenting at the conference, President Johnson was deterred because the fear of Chinese intervention never left him. General Harold Johnson, Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, disregarded China’s military power in the afternoon, when was told by the President that China had plenty of divisions, around thirty-one, to move into North Vietnam. McNamara further added that, “It would take 300,000 plus what need to combat the VC (Viet Cong).”<sup>156</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The North Vietnam case shows that clear-cut signaling was the hinge of China’s successful extended deterrent attempts. It forced Washington to fully comprehend Beijing’s political concerns and military power along the border. The Johnson Administration, especially the President himself, was deterred and China achieved its deterrent objectives. Interests and capabilities, although not unimportant, only perform through signaling.

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<sup>154</sup> “Memorandum From Senator Mike Mansfield to President Johnson,” *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. II*, p. 726.

<sup>155</sup> William Conrad Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War: Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships, Part III: January—July 1965* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 335-336.

<sup>156</sup> Jack Valenti, *A Very Human President* (New York, NY: Norton, 1975), pp. 348-349; “Meeting Files, Box 1, LBJ Library,” in David M. Barrett, ed., *Lyndon B. Johnson’s Vietnam Papers*, pp. 238, 240-241.

## CHINA'S AMBIGUOUS SIGNALS IN 1978

### CHINA'S SIGNALS AND VIETNAM'S DETERRABILITY

In mid-1978, the Kampuchean-Vietnamese conflicts reached an apex. As Prince Sihanouk recalled, Khieu Samphan, Chair of the State Presidium of Democratic Kampuchea, aroused that “the Vietnamese would swallow it [Kampuchea] up, send millions of their citizens to colonize us, reducing our eight million [in fact, only five million] Cambodians to an entire minority: it would be the end of our race and our national sovereignty.”<sup>157</sup> In December 1977, Phnom Penh had terminated diplomatic relations with Hanoi.<sup>158</sup> Vietnam sought mediation from China. After the mediation failed, Vietnam claimed on 6 January 1978 that “no reactionary force [China] whatsoever can possibly break these [Kampuchean-Vietnamese] special relations of solidarity and friendship.”<sup>159</sup> On the other hand, China began to tilt toward the Khmer Rouge. In January 1978, Deng Yingchao, Vice Chairperson of the NPC, stated publicly during her visit to Phnom Penh that “[Kampuchea] cannot be overwhelmed by any force.”<sup>160</sup> At this point, an extended deterrent relationship emerged, with Vietnam as the challenger, China the defender and Kampuchea as China’s protégé.

Hanoi’s deterrability in 1978 is a critical issue needs to be settled, but unfortunately is still debatable. Scholars only have limited access to Vietnamese archives

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<sup>157</sup> Prince Norodom Sihanouk, translated by Mary Feeney, *War and Hope: The Case for Cambodia* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1980), pp. 18-19.

<sup>158</sup> *Jiefangjun bao* [Liberation Army Daily], 1 January 1978.

<sup>159</sup> Eero Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World: Marxist-Leninist Doctrine and the Changes in International Relations, 1975-93* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), p. 97.

<sup>160</sup> *Jiefangjun bao* [Liberation Army Daily], 26 January 1978.

and the calculations of the VCP (Vietnamese Communist Party) Politburo in 1978 were especially unclear, although in general, most secondary sources argue that Hanoi faced huge pressure over possible international implications of a war, especially the risk of direct Chinese intervention.<sup>161</sup> There is a piece of evidence to demonstrate Hanoi's deterrability. An all-out war with Kampuchea might invite China's invasion of Laos, which had already been part of Vietnamese sphere of influence in 1977. In the view of Tran Quyen, a member of the VCP Central Committee, if Vietnam were to invade Kampuchea, China might occupy Laos.<sup>162</sup> There was no guarantee for Vietnamese military success in Kampuchea under this circumstance, but when Vietnam initiated the attack, it indeed needed to consider the price which it would have to pay. In conclusion, if loss aversion played a role in Vietnam's strategic thinking, it was to Vietnam's interests if it was deterrable.

China aimed to deter Vietnam from launching an all-out invasion of Kampuchea. Its policy began with economic measures. On May 12, it cancelled twenty-one economic projects. It cancelled additional fifty-four projects in the following two weeks, and finally all the remaining projects on July 3.<sup>163</sup> In addition, China closed Vietnam's consulates in Guangzhou, Kunming and Nanning on June 16.<sup>164</sup> However, despite these efforts, extended deterrence failed in early September. Le Duan, VCP General Secretary, told

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<sup>161</sup> King C. Chen, *China's War with Vietnam, 1979: Issues, Decisions, and Implications* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1987), p. 35; William J. Duiker, "China and Vietnam and Struggle for Indochina," in Joseph J. Zasloff, ed., *Postwar Indochina: Old Enemies and New Allies* (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Service Institute, U.S. Department of State, 1988), p. 162; John W. Garver, *Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), p. 313; Philip Short, *Pol Pot: Anatomy of a Nightmare* (New York, NY: Henry Holt, 2005), p. 378.

<sup>162</sup> Stephen J. Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia: Political Culture and the Causes of War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 107.

<sup>163</sup> Wang Taiping, ed., *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiaoshi, disanjuan, 1970-1978* [*Diplomatic History of the People's Republic of China, Volume Three, 1970-1978*] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1999), p. 69; *WJDSJ*, Vol. IV, p. 310.

<sup>164</sup> *WJDSJ*, Vol. IV, p. 307.

Soviet ambassador that Hanoi had set the goal “to solve fully this question [of Kampuchea] by the beginning of 1979,” because he predicted that China would not prevent changes inside Kampuchea unfavorable to it.<sup>165</sup> Vietnam therefore decided to challenge Kampuchea despite pressures from China. Vietnam invaded Kampuchea in December 1978 and the Sino-Vietnamese confrontation finally began in February 1979. As Deng Xiaoping told Prince Sihanouk, “We must fight and keep fighting the Vietnamese until they are beaten and forced to evacuate your country completely and permanently.”<sup>166</sup>

### AMBIGUOUS SIGNALS

Some scholars argue that China resolutely supported Kampuchea both in words and in deeds, and vehemently proclaimed and repeatedly acted in support of its protégé.<sup>167</sup> However, a close look will prove that China’s words and deeds could hardly be considered “resolute.” First, China avoided directly conveying threats upon Vietnam’s Kampuchea policy which pushed Vietnam to align with the Soviet Union. Second, before Vietnam invaded Kampuchea, China’s support was an empty check, although military aid had been provided. Third, after Vietnam made the decision to initiate an all-out attack, China’s hidden military maneuvers were ineffective to change Vietnam’s mind, and thus cut the extended deterrence credibility.

#### *Ambiguous Words: Indirectness in Accusing Vietnam*

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<sup>165</sup> Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, pp. 108-109.

<sup>166</sup> Sihanouk, *War and Hope*, pp. 109-110.

<sup>167</sup> Chang Pao-min, *Kampuchea between China and Vietnam* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1985), pp. 82-83.



China's signals were indirectness in accusing Vietnam before August 1978.

Although Li Xiannian, Chinese Vice Prime Minister, referred to Vietnam as a “regional hegemony” for the first time in Bangladesh on 18 March 1978, Chinese propaganda lines did *not* mention Li's following words: “we are aware of the [Vietnamese] intention of creating a ‘Greater Indochina Federation’. [W]e urge [Vietnamese] to cease the invasion of Kampuchea immediately, withdraw its troops, and settle problems through peaceful negotiations.”<sup>168</sup> China thought it could still be possible to appease Vietnam even though the extended deterrent relationship had emerged since January 1978. The omission of the words was reasonable on the Chinese side because Vo Nguyen Giap, Vietnam's Defense Minister, sent a message on March 8 congratulating Xu Xiangqian on his appointment as Vice-premier and Defense Minister of the PRC.<sup>169</sup>

Moreover, China was in pursuit of driving a wedge between Vietnam and the Soviet Union, because it realized limits of Moscow-Hanoi cooperation. For instance, Huan Xiang, an outstanding Chinese diplomat, delivered a talk on June 14 in internal discussions. He criticized Vietnam's ambitions in Southeast Asia, but also mentioned that “economic situations in Vietnam are difficult. [T]he Soviet Union is taking an advantage of the serious [Vietnam's] problems for its own objectives.” According his speech, “[China] have tried to talk to them [Vietnamese] through internal channels in the past.”<sup>170</sup> China's secret diplomatic efforts in the first half of 1978 indicated its willingness to avoid a direct confrontation with Vietnam. Instead of accusing Vietnam, China's combative rhetoric therefore was targeted on the Soviet Union. Commentaries in the Chinese official

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<sup>168</sup> Huang Hua, *Qinli yu jianwen: Huanghua huiyilu* [Personal Experience and Account: Huang Hua's Memoirs] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2007), p. 275; *Jiefangjun bao* [Liberation Army Daily], 21 March 1978.

<sup>169</sup> Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, p. 186.

<sup>170</sup> *Huan Xiang wenji, shang* [Huan Xiang's Collected Works, Vol. I] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1994), p. 453.

media in mid-1978 reported that “Soviet meddling and instigation is one of the principal factors that triggered the Vietnamese authorities’ current unbridled anti-Chinese and anti-China campaign and their moves to poison relations with China.”<sup>171</sup> China’s propaganda was not directly against Vietnam’s Kampuchea policy until the late August 1978.

The Chinese assessment of the Soviet-Vietnamese relations was correct given the Vietnamese limited willingness to fully cooperate with the Soviet Union in economic area before June 1978.<sup>172</sup> However, the correct assessment was helpless to extended deterrent efforts. China had two incompatible goals—deriving the wedge and deterring Vietnam. Accusing the Soviets diluted China’s major deterrent threats, and it can be inferred that Vietnam was reasonable to disbelieve China’s political resolve on Kampuchea. Although no direct evidence on Vietnamese perceptions of China’s signals can be presented, some indirect pieces do exist.

First, Hanoi admitted “[Chinese] threats and challenges” on June 19 but it made no concession on Kampuchea, claiming “the Vietnamese people are many, many times stronger than during the periods when our people defeated the biggest aggressive forces of all times such as the Yuan-Mongols in the past and the US imperialists in the recent years.”<sup>173</sup> Second, Vietnam discarded the unwillingness to fully cooperate with the Soviet Union in mid-1978 and from then on clung to Moscow. On June 15, the VCP Politburo requested permission for Le Duan to visit Soviet Union on June 21, emphasizing “the urgent necessity of carrying out timely consultations with the Soviet comrades.”<sup>174</sup> In

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<sup>171</sup> *Jiefangjun bao* [Liberation Army Daily], 15 and 17 June 1978; *Renmin ribao* Commentary, “Who is the Instigator,” in *Vietnam’s Expulsion of Chinese Residents* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1978), pp. 131, 137.

<sup>172</sup> Nayan Chanda, *Brother Enemy: The War after the War* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), pp. 179-191.

<sup>173</sup> Editorial of *Nhan Dan*, “The Strength of the Vietnamese People,” June 19, 1978, in *The Hoa in Vietnam Dossier, Documents of Vietnam Courier* (Hanoi: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1978), p. 102.

<sup>174</sup> Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, p. 108.

practice, Vietnam joined the Council for Economic Mutual Assistance (COMECON) on June 29. Vietnam's Vice Foreign Minister asserted immediately that "Vietnam is bound to take part in COMECON".<sup>175</sup> China's mixed verbal signals performed poorly and backfired by encouraging Vietnam's alignment with the Soviet Union and more risk-taking in Kampuchea.

### *Ambiguous Actions: Hidden Military Aid*

China's concern over the Khmer Rouge's survival was a vital Chinese interest to break Soviet-Vietnamese encirclement. Hua Guofeng, CCP Chairman and Chinese Prime Minister, and Deng Xiaoping met with Son Sen, Khmer Rouge's Defense Minister on 30 July 1978. In internal discussions, China placed abundant military aid at Kampuchea's disposal.<sup>176</sup> Chinese leaders explicitly told their counterparts that "it is clear right now Kampuchean-Vietnamese conflicts are unusual: Vietnam intends to create an Indochinese Federation with the Soviet help."<sup>177</sup>

However, China issued ambiguous signals by hiding its military aid. In summer 1978, when a Kampuchean-Vietnamese border war was imminent, China did nothing publicly but praise the heroic Kampucheans for their fearlessness in defeating invaders. Even on the brink of deterrence failure on September 4, Chinese leaders were still silent about military aid, only saying that "Kampuchea has been subjected to enormous pressures but it is confidently standing towering in the East."<sup>178</sup> The Chinese media did not cover Pol Pot's secret visit in the last ten days of September. Apparently, China

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<sup>175</sup> Guo Ming, ed., *Zhongyue guanxi yanbian sishi nian* [Forty Years of Evolving Sino-Vietnamese Relations] (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1992), p. 113.

<sup>176</sup> *Jiefangjun bao* [Liberation Army Daily], 31 July 1978.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 August 1978.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 September 1978.

insisted on standing behind the stage, although Deng Xiaoping had made it clear that China would provide the Kampuchians with all military aid.<sup>179</sup> In early November, Wang Dongxing, CCP Vice Chairman, paid a visit to Phnom Penh and Pol Pot proposed that “the government of Democratic Kampuchea and the CPK know that they can count on the help of the fraternal Chinese army if the need arises.” Although China had decided to mobilize troops along the border at this point, Pol Pot’s above paragraph was deleted and China only claimed vaguely that it would “help Kampuchians safeguard independence and territorial integrity”.<sup>180</sup>

Receiving such ambiguous signals, Hanoi audaciously pushed its war preparation forward. In June, according to an interview with Xuan Thuy, Vice-Chairman of Vietnam’s National Assembly, Vietnam underwent a major military buildup, reorienting its economy to the new security requirements, and reducing the army’s economic reconstruction role.<sup>181</sup> The VCP Central Secretariat issued an additional declaration on August 11 that Vietnamese civilians and military officials “should achieve the victory in the Southwest [along Kampuchean-Vietnamese border].”<sup>182</sup> Le Duan made the decision for an all-out attack in September and never changed his mind since then. Although the Vietnamese Vice Foreign Minister admitted “the Khmer Rouges are assured they have 800 million Chinese behind them,” Vietnam still pressed ahead at the end of October 1978.<sup>183</sup> Although Vietnam described Wang’s trip to Kampuchea as “carrying out Peking’s [Beijing] hegemonist scheme—fighting Vietnam to the last Kampuchean citizen,” it still

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<sup>179</sup> Short, *Pol Pot*, pp. 388-389.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 391-392; *Jiefangjun bao* [*Liberation Army Daily*], 6 and 8 November 1978.

<sup>181</sup> Gareth Porter, “Vietnamese Policy and the Indochina Crisis,” in David W. P. Elliott ed., *The Third Indochina Conflict* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), p. 105.

<sup>182</sup> *Jiefangjun bao* [*Liberation Army Daily*], 5 November 1978.

<sup>183</sup> Wilfred Burchett, *The China-Cambodia-Vietnam Triangle* (Chicago, IL: Vanguard Books, 1981), p. 149.

initiated the all-out attack in the following weeks regardless of China's deterrent attempts.<sup>184</sup>

*Ambiguous Actions: Hidden Military Maneuvers*

By September, a Kampuchean-Vietnamese war was approaching. As discussed before, in Le Duan's private discussions with the Soviet ambassador in early September, Hanoi had set its heart on solving "fully this question [of Kampuchea] by the beginning of 1979". Regarding China's extended deterrent attempts, Le Duan stated that a Chinese offensive by land would be "very complex", and the Chinese "haven't managed to do anything so far."<sup>185</sup> Le Duan was correct, because Chinese policymakers were discussing, while made no decision to mount any military maneuver as signals to deter Vietnam's potential attack in September.<sup>186</sup> China's insufficient political resolve on the use of force before Vietnam's decision to attack Kampuchea was part of the reason of the deterrence failure.

Only after Hanoi had decided to oust the Khmer Rouge did China send clearer *verbal* signals. Deng Xiaoping publicly linked China's deterrent posture with Vietnam's possible invasion of Kampuchea on November 8, asserting that whether China would resort to force depended on the extent to which Vietnam carried out aggression against Kampuchea.<sup>187</sup> The Chinese propaganda additionally alleged on November 10 that "we [Chinese] people will see how far you [Vietnam] will go [in Kampuchea]."<sup>188</sup> On December 12, Wei Guoqing, CCP Politburo, delivered a tough speech when he visited the

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<sup>184</sup> Chen, *China's War with Vietnam*, p. 36.

<sup>185</sup> Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, pp. 108-109.

<sup>186</sup> Zhou Deli, *Yige gaoji canmouzhang de zishu* [*Personal Recollections of a High-Ranking Chief of Staff*] (Nanjing: Nanjing chubanshe, 1992), pp. 239-243.

<sup>187</sup> *Jiefangjun bao* [*Liberation Army Daily*], 9 November 1978.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 November 1978.

Sino-Vietnamese border and claimed “Vietnam has become the Cuba of the East. [W]e should be vigilant and annihilate enemies.”<sup>189</sup> Li Xiannian on the following day issued a warning that China had its limits.<sup>190</sup>

However, China lost the last chance to send clear-cut *non-verbal* signals by hiding military maneuvers. Chengdu and Guangzhou Military Regions (MR) sent troops to the Sino-Vietnamese border in November and December.<sup>191</sup> However, China tried to hide its intentions in a variety of ways. First, Xu Shiyu, the local commander-in-chief in Guangzhou MR, argued in private “there can never be too much deception in war (*bingbu yanzha*). [W]e should try our best to confuse our enemies.” Xu wished the Chinese military maneuvers might appear to be troop camping to Vietnamese intelligence agencies. He accordingly commanded his troops of Guangzhou MR to change license plates into Guangxi Military District. Second, above the brigade level, the PLA’s radio broadcasts were kept working as normal to confuse Vietnamese.<sup>192</sup> Third, the PLA’s rail and road traffic moved at night, and Chinese governments imposed curfews. Sensitive areas in some China’s opened cities were temporarily closed again.<sup>193</sup>

China’s secret military maneuvers, as those before the intervention in Korea, could aim at initiating surprise attacks. However, the inconsistency of China’s words and actions—conveying verbal threats while secretly deploying troops—undermined the credibility. Van Tien Dung, PAVN (People’s Army of Vietnam) Chief of Staff, arrived in the fifth military region adjacent to Kampuchea on December 12, and required the

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<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 December 1978.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 and 16 December 1978.

<sup>191</sup> Zhang Zhen, *Zhang Zhen huiyilu, xia* [*Zhang Zhen’s Memoirs, Vol. I*] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2003), pp. 165-166; Wang Chenghan, *Wang Chenghan huiyilu* [*Wang Chenghan’s Memoirs*] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2004), p. 535; Zhou Deli, *Xu shiyu de zuihou yizhan* [*The Last Battle of Xu Shiyu*] (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1990), p. 39.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>193</sup> Edward C. O’Dowd, *Chinese Military Strategy in the Third Indochina War: The Last Maoist War* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 51.

officials and soldiers there to achieve “any objective in the new stage”.<sup>194</sup> General Giap on December 21 asserted that Vietnam “will adopt offensive strategies and take the advantages to defeat our enemies.”<sup>195</sup> Four days later, Hanoi sent more than 100,000 troops and occupied Phnom Penh in January 1979. No matter how clear China verbal signals were, they were useless due to the absence of demonstrating seriousness by announcing the military mobilization.

## TESTING COMPETING THEORIES

### *Balance of Interests?*

BOI argues that China’s extended deterrence failure was due to asymmetric interests in Vietnam’s favor. Duiker for instance argues that, “to party leaders in Hanoi, [t]he ‘special relationship’ with Cambodia was not a negotiable issue but a matter of national survival.”<sup>196</sup> Amer also takes a similar angle. “From a geo-strategic perspective these two countries [Laos and Kampuchea] are of paramount importance to Vietnam’s security, while they are of less importance to China.”<sup>197</sup>

This explanation might be convincing because BOI indeed favored Vietnam regarding Kampuchea. From China’s perspective, it supported Kampuchea mainly to break the Soviet-Vietnamese encirclement. As Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Zhong Xidong claimed on 19 September 1978, “[The Soviet Union] needs the service of the Vietnam’s regional hegemonism and wants it to play the ‘role of an outpost in Southeast

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<sup>194</sup> *Jiefangjun bao* [*Liberation Army Daily*], 13 December 1978.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 December 1978.

<sup>196</sup> William J. Duiker, *China and Vietnam: the Roots of Conflict* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1986), p. 66.

<sup>197</sup> Ramses Amer, “Sino-Vietnamese Relations: Past, Present and Future,” in Carlyle A. Thayer and Ramses Amer, eds., *Vietnamese Foreign Policy in Transition* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), pp. 99-101.

Asia.’ The Soviet Union has the need to use Vietnam while Vietnam has the need of Soviet patronage, and such is the relationship between the two.”<sup>198</sup> From Vietnam’s perspective, similarly, it needed to break the Chinese-Kampuchean encirclement. However, Vietnam also needed to deal with a belligerent Khmer Rouge regime along its border, which China did not have a similar concern.

First, Vietnam had to break the Chinese-Kampuchean encirclement that it could not have been clearer that it was not merely playing with Kampuchea. *Hanoi Radio* stated on 21 February 1978 that “imperialists [U.S.] and international reactionaries [China] have helped [the Kampucheans] build up and equip overnight a dozen divisions armed with long-range artillery and war planes which Kampuchea did not have before 1975.”<sup>199</sup> A secret document published by the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry in June 1978 clearly noted that “China had tried to limit Vietnamese influence in Laos and Cambodia by supporting those regimes that have opposed Vietnam.”<sup>200</sup> On September 17, an article in *Tap Chi Cong San*, VCP’s theoretical journal, analyzed that “the reactionary Pol Pot-Ieng Sary clique is a lord-thirsty lackey clique badly needed by Chinese.”<sup>201</sup> In December, the VCP’s fifth Plenum unanimously “pointed out the new difficulties caused by the Chinese reactionaries’ schemes and acts.”<sup>202</sup> On December 21, General Giap alleged that “the Beijing reactionary clique is trying its best in conspiracy with [t]he most shameless

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<sup>198</sup> “Statement by Chung Hui-tung, Leader of the Chinese Government Delegation, at the Seventh Session of the Sino-Vietnamese Talks,” *On Vietnam’s Expulsion of Chinese Residents*, p. 105.

<sup>199</sup> *Hanoi Radio*, February, 21, 1978, see Stephen P. Heder, “The Kampuchean-Vietnamese Conflict,” in Elliott, ed., *The Third Indochina Conflict*, p. 50.

<sup>200</sup> Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Report on the International Strategy of China,” June 1978, DRV Indochina Files, June 1980, in Steven J. Hood, *Dragons Entangled: Indochina and the China-Vietnam War*, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), pp. 45-46.

<sup>201</sup> Chen, *China’s War with Vietnam*, p. 35.

<sup>202</sup> Institute of the History of the Communist Party of Vietnam under the Institute of Marxism-Leninism (directly belonging to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam), *History of the Communist Party of Vietnam* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1986), pp. 282-283.



reactionary clique [Pol Pot].”<sup>203</sup> In Truong Chinh’s words, the Chairman of the Vietnamese National Assembly of Vietnam, saw “the problem of Kampuchea fundamentally as the problem of China.” He explicitly argued that “Vietnam is facing a two-prolonged aggression and was caught in a pincer movement, from the southwest the Pol Pot-Ieng Sary army, and from the north, by Chinese expansionism which was ready to across the border at any time.” Vietnam just had to “strike in the south, clear the north (*danh nam, dep doc*).”<sup>204</sup>

Second, Vietnam regarded establishing a “special relationship” with Kampuchea as especially vital, which were challenged by the Khmer Rouge. Le Duan asserted in May 1975: “We pledge to strengthen the unshakable militant friendship between the Vietnamese people and the people in our two fraternal neighbor countries—Laos and Cambodia.”<sup>205</sup> As he additionally stated at the Fourth Party Congress in December 1976, “the three countries [Vietnam, Laos, and Kampuchea] have been associated with one another for ever in building and defense.”<sup>206</sup> Nguyen Duy Trinh, Vietnam’s Foreign Minister, further elaborated that “the close solidarity between the three countries is of vital importance. [W]e will do all we can to safeguard and develop this special relationship.”<sup>207</sup>

Vietnamese vital interests had been threatened by Khmer Rouge’s hostile actions since mid-1975. The Vietnamese *chargé d’affaires* even directly told Prince Sihanouk in

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<sup>203</sup> *Jiefangjun bao* [Liberation Army Daily], 26 December 1978.

<sup>204</sup> Truong Chinh, *On Kampuchea* (Hanoi: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1980), p. 13. Also see Charles McGregor, *The Sino-Vietnamese Relationship and the Soviet Union* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1988), pp. 39-40.

<sup>205</sup> Le Duan, “Forward to the Future, Speech Delivered at the Meeting Held in Hanoi to Celebrate Victory, 15 May 1975,” in *Le Duan Selected Writings* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1977), p. 539.

<sup>206</sup> Le Duan, “Political Report of the Central Committee,” in Communist Party of Viet Nam, ed., *Fourth National Congress Documents* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1977), p. 151.

<sup>207</sup> William J. Duiker, *Vietnam since the Fall of Saigon* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1989), p. 129.

August 1975 that “the Vietnam-Cambodia conflict had been started by [Cambodia] as an undeclared war. [T]he objective [of the Khmer Rouge] was to ‘occupy a large portion of South Vietnam along the Cambodian border and work toward exterminating the Vietnamese population.’”<sup>208</sup> In April and September 1977, Kampuchean units, backed by artillery, crossed into Vietnam in force, slaughtering hundreds of local inhabitants and razing their villages. According to Vietnamese officials, nearly a thousand people were killed or suffered serious injuries.<sup>209</sup> More than two thousand Vietnamese were killed and seventy-one thousand people evacuated from the frontier villages, abandoning some thirty-seven thousand acres of cultivable land between September 1977 and November 1978.<sup>210</sup> On 2 September 1977 Vietnamese diplomats in Phnom Penh even directly informed Pol Pot: “We have documentary evidence that you intend to take over Saigon and that you dream of dominating South Vietnam.”<sup>211</sup>

It is safe to conclude that BOI favored Vietnam instead of China, and additionally, it is correct for BOI to predict the deterrence failure. The theoretical perspective, nevertheless, is still insufficient because it leaves the timing of the all-out attack in December 1978 unexplained. Prior to the invasion, the Vietnam’s interests asymmetry with China was a constant factor over the Indochina peninsula in 1978, which could hardly explain Vietnam’s significant policy shifts during the year. Hanoi did take several counter-measures before the autumn of 1978, but none intended to topple the Khmer Rouge.<sup>212</sup> Moreover, Hanoi made political efforts to negotiate a peaceful settlement with Phnom Penh. On February 5, Hanoi put forward a detailed proposal for a cease-fire with

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<sup>208</sup> Sihanouk, *War and Hope*, p. 40.

<sup>209</sup> Short, *Pol Pot*, pp. 372-375.

<sup>210</sup> Burchett, *The China-Cambodia-Vietnam Triangle*, p. 156.

<sup>211</sup> Burchett, *The China-Cambodia-Vietnam Triangle*, p. 160.

<sup>212</sup> Robert S. Ross, *The Indochina Tangle: China’s Vietnam Policy, 1975-1979* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 134; Philip Short, *Pol Pot*, p. 377.

Kampuchea, including ending military activities, border negotiations and international guarantee and supervision, a proposal reiterated on March 2.<sup>213</sup> In the following two months, Hanoi issued several conflict resolution proposals to the U.N. to leave the Vietnamese unhurt.<sup>214</sup> Xuan Thuy still claimed on July 29 that Vietnam was waiting for “an appropriate response from the Kampuchean authorities to its fair and reasonable proposal for negotiation.”<sup>215</sup> Although Vietnamese initiatives could have been diplomatic setup to demonstrate other options had been ineffective, it is evident that Hanoi was not provoked by asymmetric interests involved to invade Kampuchea in December 1978. BOI therefore is insufficient to explain aspects of this extended deterrence failure.

### *Balance of Capabilities?*

BOC suggests that China’s deterrence failure was due to its inability to inflict unacceptable damage upon Vietnam. First, China’s deterrent attempts by military power were weak.<sup>216</sup> Second, Kampuchean forces were also weak.<sup>217</sup> Third, China’s deterrent threats were offset by the Vietnamese alliance with the Soviet Union. According to James Mulvenon, “the threat from Moscow was the most significant factor, for the Russians’ looming presence in the war reduced the credibility of Chinese threats of escalation, undermining a key pillar of successful coercive diplomacy.”<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> “Statement of the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on the Relations between Vietnam and Kampuchea, (February 5, 1978),” in Vietnam Courier, ed., *Kampuchea Dossier I* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1978), pp. 92-93; Luu Van Loi, *Fifty Years of Vietnamese Diplomacy 1945-1995, Vol. II* (Hanoi: The Gioi Publishers, 2002), p. 95; Sihanouk, *War and Hope*, p. 65.

<sup>214</sup> Burchett, *The China-Cambodia-Vietnam Triangle*, p. 161; Hoang Nguyen, “Peking’s Shadow over Angkor (August 15, 1978),” in Vietnam Courier, ed., *Kampuchea Dossier II*, (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1978), pp. 17-18; *The Vietnam-Kampuchea Conflict: A Historical Record* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1979), p. 33.

<sup>215</sup> “Xuan Thuy’s Statement at the July 29 Press Conference in Havana,” in Vietnam Courier ed., *Kampuchea Dossier II*, p. 133.

<sup>216</sup> Abram N. Shulsky, *Deterrence Theory and Chinese Behavior* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2000), p. 72.

<sup>217</sup> Duiker, *Vietnam since the Fall of Saigon*, pp. 183-184.

<sup>218</sup> James Mulvenon, “The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy: The 1979 Sino-Vietnamese Border War,” *Journal of*

However, the first two claims are invalid, and the third one needs to be reevaluated. BOC actually favored China as the defender. First, Vietnam's real military power was less powerful than Hanoi claimed in February and March 1979.<sup>219</sup> The VCP was left with only five divisions along the Sino-Vietnamese border, four of them protecting Hanoi, albeit the Vietnamese were relatively well-equipped and well-disciplined. Hanoi deployed a 70,000-man Border Security Force and an additional 50,000 lightly armed militia troops, while there were more than 300,000 Chinese troops.<sup>220</sup> During the war, China successfully destroyed over 300 Vietnamese villages, four sizeable towns, all the factories in the area, a railroad line, a power plant, and a phosphate mine—the country's main source of fertilizer.<sup>221</sup>

Second, Khmer Rouge was highly dependent on China's aid and protection, which Vietnam fully understood. China provided, repaired and refurbished 10,000 tons of military equipment, including 100 120-mm artillery pieces and 1,300 military vehicles.<sup>222</sup> The actual military equipment China delivered included 2 fast gunships each over 800 tons, 4 patrol boats, 200 tanks, 300 armored cars, 300 artillery pieces, six jet fighters, two bombers, and 30,000 tons of assorted ammunition.<sup>223</sup> Vietnam therefore was clear that Kampuchea was not the real concern because China was the boss. The problem could be Vietnam's estimates of China's aid to Kampuchea could never confirmed by China's signals during the crisis.

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*Northeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Fall 1995), pp. 68-69.

<sup>219</sup> *Zhang Wannian junshi wenxuan* [Zhang Wannian's Selected Works on Military Affairs] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2008), pp. 25-26.

<sup>220</sup> Chen, *China's War with Vietnam*, p. 103; Spencer C. Tucker, *Vietnam* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), p. 199.

<sup>221</sup> *New Yorker*, April 22, 1985, in David Dellinger, *Vietnam Revisited: from Covert Action to Invasion to Reconstruction* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1986), pp. 163-164.

<sup>222</sup> Short, *Pol Pot*, pp. 301-302.

<sup>223</sup> Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 132.

Third, it is true that the Soviet-Vietnamese alliance was used as a deterrent message against potential Chinese invasion after the deterrence failure. As *Tap Chi Cong San* asserted, “the inevitable outcome of a military attack upon the USSR and the fraternal socialist countries closely linked to it...[w]ould be heavy retaliation.”<sup>224</sup> Soviet leaders, such as General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, also admitted on November 3 that the treaty had already become a “political reality” and that “whether they [the Chinese] want it or not, they will have to reckon with this reality.”<sup>225</sup> The treaty was therefore a political preparation for Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea.

However, BOC’s explanation still cannot fully hold for two reasons. First, from May to September 1978, Moscow’s support had limited influence on Hanoi’s final decision to attack Kampuchea. A piece of evidence came from General Van Tien Dung’s arguments in VCP’s theoretical journal, addressing Vietnam’s strategic strengths and weaknesses. He argued that two factors related to Soviet support had *not* been achieved—“the newly recognized and technically developed national armed forces” and “international support.”<sup>226</sup> Until September Vietnam was still considered by Vietnamese leaders themselves as a weak secondary power. Second, Soviet aid to Vietnam in November and December 1978 was only “symbolic gesture” because only “20 MIG-24 swept-wing fighter planes were on the route to Hanoi”.<sup>227</sup> Albeit Vietnam received some Soviet assistance, it could not depend upon the assistance to invade Kampuchea and fail China’s deterrent attempts.

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<sup>224</sup> Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia*, p. 214.

<sup>225</sup> Harry Gelman, *The Soviet Far East Buildup and Soviet Risk-taking Against China* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1982), p. 95; Harry Gelman, *The Brezhnev Politburo and the Decline of Détente* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 167-168.

<sup>226</sup> Douglas Pike, “Communist vs. Communist in Southeast Asia,” *International Security*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Summer 1979), p. 24.

<sup>227</sup> Douglas Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union: Anatomy of An Alliance* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), p. 196.

In conclusion, two specific BOC arguments are mistaken, and the third is insufficient. Additionally, if the theory was correct, and BOC was indeed favorable to China, China could have won, but it actually failed.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In the Kampuchean-Vietnamese conflict, Beijing's ineffective signals led to an extended deterrence failure. China made two fatal mistakes in conveying threats. First, it wasted time on mixed *verbal* signals from June to August 1978. Not only did those signals encourage Vietnam to advance in Kampuchea, they also drove it to the Soviet Union. Second, it wasted efforts on ambiguous *non-verbal* signals. The deterrence failure was partially caused by China's silence about its huge military aid to Kampuchea, which Vietnam could not accurately interpret. Additionally, seeing no sign of military threats, Vietnam underestimated the danger of Sino-Vietnamese war and took China's clear-cut warnings in the last phase before the deterrence failure as bluffs. It accordingly attacked the Kampuchea with full confidence. In addition, neither BOI nor BOC is sufficient to explain the low credibility of deterrent threats if without considering defender's signals.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND CHINA'S ASCENT**

Why do extended deterrent attempts fail? This study seeks to answer this question and contribute to studies of China's Cold War coercive diplomacy. A successful extended deterrent threat, which is by its nature a problem of credibility, requires an effective

demonstration of the defenders' interests and capabilities through a signaling strategy.

Clear-cut signals, including words and deeds, lend credence and thus increase the possibility of successful deterrence. Ambiguous signaling, conversely, is likely to fail. If ambiguous non-verbal signaling, such as delaying or concealed military maneuvers, fails to check escalating disputes, the defender's well-preparedness and political resolve may not be acknowledged, and thus extended deterrent attempts become less credible.

	1950	1965	1978
BOI	To the defender	To the defender	To the challenger
BOC	To the defender	To the defender	To the defender
Defender's Signals	Ambiguous	Clear-cut	Ambiguous
Deterrent Outcome	Failure	Success	Failure

As the table shows, signaling strategy directly affected the results of deterrence outcomes in all three cases. Such effect could not be achieved by BOI or BOC, as predictions by either theory could not fully explain results. Moreover, a comparative case study, although imperfect, shows that signaling is a more powerful variable across time and space. First, for both the cases in 1950 and 1965, BOI and BOC favored the same defender and different protégés were challenged by two U.S. administrations. However, as the signals were interpreted differently according to U.S. archives, the results varied. Second, comparing the two cases of 1950 and 1978, different BOI conditions generated the same deterrent results, but signaling theory and BOC could explain the conflicting phenomenon. Third, BOC was invalid in explaining the different outcomes in 1965 and

1978, while signaling-assisted BOI could do the job. In conclusion, signaling technique is the only factor that survives all three comparisons.

Besides its explanatory power, the research program of signaling extended deterrent threats is also crucial to understanding a rising China and its possible power projection over its *de facto* allies in mainland East Asia, such as North Korea, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar and Central Asian states. How can we draw conclusions that will illuminate China's foreign postures in the post-Cold era?

First, what could we learn from China's Cold War experience as a signaler to protect its allies? Chinese analysts emphasize that increased transparency can make China's enemies more confident and thereby reduce China's deterrent capabilities.<sup>228</sup> However, as Cold War records show, a direct military confrontation with other powers is more likely if Beijing sent ambiguous signals. This might be more dangerous to China itself than demonstrating its limited interests and capabilities to achieve deterrent goals would be.

Second, will China rise peacefully? Deterrence failure can explain China's belligerent postures, especially use of force, to a certain extent.<sup>229</sup> China's external use of force therefore is likely to be more frequent in future as its overseas interests grow more important. However, that China will do so is no more than a prediction. There might be a possibility of a peaceful rise, if China achieves extended deterrent goals. As discussed in this paper, mastering strategies for signaling—conveying interests and capabilities

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<sup>228</sup> Thomas J. Christensen, "China, the U.S.-Japan Alliances, and the Security Dilemma in East Asia," in G. John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno, eds., *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 39.

<sup>229</sup> Michael Yahuda, *Towards the End of Isolationism: China's Foreign Policy after Mao* (London: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 114-118; Allen S. Whiting, "China's Use of Force, 1950-96, and Taiwan," *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Fall 2001), pp. 103-131; Robert S. Ross, *Chinese Security Policy: Structure, Power and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 117-178.



through careful maneuvers over its signals—would safeguard China’s protégés and improve China’s own security environment as a continental power.